Of Ice and Men

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at https://archiveofourown.org/works/77051451.

Rating:
Explicit

Archive Warning:
No Archive Warnings Apply

Category:
M/M

Fandom:
Heated Rivalry (TV)

Relationship:
Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov

Characters:
Ilya Rozanov, Shane Hollander, Yuna Hollander, David Hollander, Hayden Pike, Svetlana Vetrova, Original Children of Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov, Original Male Character(s), Rose Landry, JJ Dagenais

Additional Tags:
Alpha/Beta/Omega Dynamics, Omega Shane Hollander, Alpha Ilya Rozanov, Omegaverse Omega Pregnancy, Mpreg | Male Pregnancy, Dom/sub, Sub Shane Hollander, Dom Ilya Rozanov, Top Ilya Rozanov, Bottom Shane Hollander, Size Difference, Size Kink, Jealous Shane Hollander, Possessive Behavior, Mating Cycles/In Heat, Mating Bites, Brat Shane Hollander, no beta we die like men, Injured Shane Hollander, Brat Tamer Ilya Rozanov, Baby Trapping, Barebacking, Noncon but Not Really, they are stupid and dont talk to each other, Face Slapping, Fake/Pretend Relationship, Not Between Main Pairing, Open Relationships, but not really, Fluff and Angst

Language:
English

Stats:
Published: 2026-01-04 Completed: 2026-01-27 Words: 63,063
Chapters: 10/10

Of Ice and Men

by SugarandWhiskey (Smollypolly)

Summary

"Shane and Ilya weren't technically dating exclusively. Ilya could technically do whatever he wanted, but that technicality was mostly a glass wall in their relationship. Ilya should have known better than to go this far. Ilya knew Shane would see this. Ilya knew how jealous Shane got.

Ilya knew, and he did it anyway.

Obviously, Shane needed to tighten his leash. If Ilya wanted babies, he should have known that his only choice was Shane. "

or

The baby-trapping fic of my dreams.

Notes

I love a good baby trapping fic so I thought I would contribute to my favorite tag. This fic is inspired heavily by Reyschien and their two crazy good baby trapping fics: https://archiveofourown.org/works/59597251 & https://archiveofourown.org/works/55643713

Also shout out to my sister for the medical terminology and rehabilitation that takes place in this fic. You're a real one. I wonder if our parents know you use your medical degree to fund my hockey yaoi hyperfixation. Let's hope not!

Enjoy :3

Chapter 1: The magazine

Ilya Rozanov was a problem.

The Russian was constantly in the tabloids, selling their magazines like hot cakes from all the outrageous behavior he participated in. He should demand that they start cutting him a check for all of his time spent on their front pages. From getting speeding tickets in his fancy foreign sports cars to his weekly paparazzi shots of beautiful women and omegas hanging on his arm and neck and out of his stupid fancy foreign sports cars.

Shane could deal with that. He knew Ilya did not really care about these people. Really, they were just a placeholder for him when they weren't in the same city. Pretty little toys for when Shane was busy being the best hockey player in the league (not that Rozanov would ever admit that).

Ilya had told him for years that's all they were. Shane was the one he really wanted, but hockey being the world that it was, being seen with Ilya would ruin Shane's career more than it would ever affect Ilya's. Ilya was an alpha; of course, he would be with omegas. It was expected of him. All of the alphas in the league were expected to have dating scandals. But being an omega in the patriarchal alpha-centered sport was already hard enough. He didn't need rumors spreading that alphas were giving him special treatment. That Shane had slept his way to the top.

No. He did not need that kind of publicity when he was starting out in the NHL. He let Ilya, his gorgeous, strong, and independent alpha, off his leash and let him play with the local population of toys in Boston. They had rules. Ilya knew what he was and wasn't allowed to do. He respected Shane and their relationship, no matter how secretive it was.

Well, the joke really is on him.

This time, Ilya had gone too far. Shane glared at the glossy cover of the magazine and tapped his finger aggressively against his marble countertop. Nail clacking against the stone with sharp taps. Shane should have known this was going to happen.

Stupid alphas.

Hayden had given it to him at practice as a joke. A way to make fun of the Russian and his antics. Hayden thought it would be funny. Shane did not, in fact, find it funny. The cover showed Ilya and a pretty omega crossing the street somewhere in a bar district. Ilya had his gaze forward and was looking for cars as they crossed, and the omega was clutching his bicep like he might disappear. Staring up at the alpha like he hung the moon.

The headline splashed across the page said, “A Star Baby for the All-Star Alpha? Hockey Royalty Welcomes a New Member!”

He felt nauseous.

Shane and Ilya weren’t technically dating exclusively. Ilya could technically do whatever he wanted, but that technicality was mostly a glass wall in their relationship. Ilya should have known better than to go this far. Ilya knew Shane would see this. Ilya knew how jealous Shane got.

Ilya knew, and he did it anyway.

Obviously, Shane needed to tighten his leash. If Ilya wanted babies, he should have known that his only choice was Shane. Not some dime-a-dozen omega that he found in some sticky bar.

Nobody knew Ilya Rozanov like Shane Hollander. He knew his workout schedule, his practice schedule, and his game schedule. He knew all of his favorite foods and what brand of vodka and cigarettes he preferred. Shane knew how evil his brother was and how his father treated him until the very end. Shane knew how important family was to Ilya. Shane knew everything.

So why did he go and knock up someone else?

No. He will not lose this. If he wants something, he will reach out and take it like he always has. He refuses to let Ilya ruin his life like this. He is obviously incapable of making smart choices, so Shane will just have to make this choice for both of them.

If Ilya insists on having a baby, then Shane will give him one. He will give him as many as it takes to make him stay with him forever.

—

Ilya stops in the doorway just as he enters his house. It's late, and he had gone out with his team to celebrate their win after the game. He had expected to come home to an empty house and immediately go to bed.

But standing in his kitchen, casually drinking a ginger ale, was Shane. Shane, who should have been in Montreal. Shane, who he hadn't seen in weeks. Shane, who had a blank look on his face, but his scent was sharp and acrid.

"Uh," he said intelligently.

"Congratulations." Shane sounded calm, but Ilya knew better than to believe that facade. The scent the omega was pushing out into his kitchen was strong enough to make his eyes water.

"Thank you."

Ilya carefully closed the door behind himself and dropped his duffel to the ground. They stood several meters apart, staring at each other over the kitchen island without saying anything else. The distant clicking of the wall clock in the living room was the only sound breaking the tense silence.

"You're here, in Boston," Ilya says cautiously. He felt like Shane was a wild animal waiting for a sign of weakness to strike.

"What an astute observation, Rozanov."

Ah, the last name. Shane was definitely angry. They never call each other by their last name in private anymore. They grew out of that the 4th time they slept together.

Ilya started racking his brain for any reason his omega was standing in his dark kitchen at 3 am on a Tuesday, drinking ginger ale menacingly. He felt an icy stream of dread roll down his spine when he saw the magazine on the counter between them. The dim illumination from the stove light shines on the glossy cover. The massive headline in big, blocky white letters detailing exactly why Shane was here.

"Ah."

Shane glares at him as he inches closer. Trying to get a full look at the picture on the magazine cover. It was a candid shot of Ilya and Carter walking across the street to a bar. The picture itself was innocuous.

Ilya knew Shane didn't care about the people he fucked around with. But the picture combined with the title made Ilya feel a sharp fear he hadn't felt since his father was alive.

"So, I found an interesting article today. Who knew you were in a committed relationship with Carter Moses! How exciting. He was very good in his part in his last movie. What was it again? Local loser? Sounds accurate. When is your baby due, Rozanov?"

Ilya knew better than to rise to the bait. Shane's syrupy sweet voice meant he was on thin ice, but the need to defend himself was eating around the edges of his sleep-deprived brain.

"Shane, it's not—" He stopped when Shane lifted a small hand signaling him to stop talking.

"You know, I let you get away with a lot of shit most people would hate their boyfriends doing. I let you fuck around and enjoy your supposed bachelor lifestyle. Whatever, I don't actually give a shit about these people you surround yourself with. But getting someone pregnant? Are you actually fucking kidding me?"

Ilya could tell Shane had been crying. He looked like a wreck. Hair tousled, eyes were puffy and pink. His nose was red from wiping it. But Ilya also knew that if Shane had cried and he was finally out of tears by the time of this confrontation, then he had two options.

One, he could grovel (which he will probably end up doing no matter what), and two. Admit he was wrong, and he will fix it.

"I'm sorry."

Shane glared at him, his lip curling back to show a single little fang. The apology felt like an admission.

"Can we sit down, please? I don't want to have this conversation standing in my kitchen."
Shane huffed and walked past him to go sit in the living room. It did not pass his notice that he took the long way out of the room so he wouldn't have to walk near Ilya. That hurt more than it probably should have.

He knew Shane was angry and disappointed in him, but he missed him. He hadn't seen him in weeks, and the physical pull the smaller man had on him was heady. Shane was wearing baggy sweats that bunched around his ankles, and a big t-shirt (that was probably Ilya's

at some point in time) was hanging from his frame, making him look smaller than he was.

Ilya wanted to grab his chin and make him look up at him. Kiss his pretty lips and apologize. Rub his nose against Shane's freckles and beg for forgiveness. But he knew that had to wait. Shane would definitely bite him if he touched him right now.

Ilya settled on the opposite side of the couch from Shane and turned his body so one leg was propped on the couch so he could look at the side of Shane's face. Shane sat facing forward. Staring at the black TV screen and avoiding Ilyas's eyes.

He did this when he was overwhelmed. When forcing eye contact was too hard and letting someone see into his soul was too exhausting. Shane wasn't a confrontational person. He could fight, and he could win, but he never started it. Ilya knew he fucked up royally for Shane to fly all the way to Boston to have this conversation face-to-face.

He knew that if he didn't fix this tonight, Shane would not be his anymore in the morning. The little omega would flutter his eyelashes as he cried and leave Ilya's life forever. And really, that's just not a reality Ilya ever wanted to experience.

"Carter isn't pregnant. He is lying."

Shane rolled his eyes, looking over at him with venom in his gaze before rolling his neck away again.

"Look, I know you are mad at me right now, but please just let me explain before you react."

Shane sighed deeply and squashed himself further into the far corner of the couch, clutching a pillow to his chest as a shield. Ilya continued.

"I did not see this article yet. It must have come out this morning when I was busy with game prep. Carter is not pregnant. We never fucked. He sucked me in back alley of a bar, and I drove him home. The picture must have been taken when we were going into the bar last week."

Shane slowly turned his head towards Ilya but kept his eyes down. Picking at his socks as a distraction. It was a clear sign he was listening, though.

Ilya breathed out a heavy sigh, settling back into the couch, exhausted. He did not want to have this conversation. “I don’t know why he is lying. We never even went on a date. I never take anyone on dates except you. You know this, Солнышко.”

The term of endearment made Shane's fingers twitch. A good sign.

“If you never slept with him, why can he accurately describe your downtown apartment?”

Ilya furrowed his brow. “He described my house?”

The genuine confusion in Ilyas' voice made Shane fully look over at him. Narrowing his eyes as he took in Ilya’s reaction. Searching for deception.

“Yes. He described the layout and your furniture like he had been inside before.”

Ilya felt his face pale. Shane turned fully on the couch to face him.

“Wait, did you really not take him home with you?”

“No.”

Shane raised his eyebrows in surprise. “Oh my god. That freak broke into your house!”

“I think, I need to call building management to get security footage,” Ilya said with a small tremor in his voice.

Stalkers aren’t anything new for athletes, but most of the time, it’s just creepy, invasive pictures or having to change your phone number because someone sold it on the dark web to other obsessed stalkers. Breaking into someone’s house was next level, though.

“You should file a police report and probably talk to your manager to sue Carter.” Shane paused before adding, “Also, if he won’t withdraw his pregnancy statement, you need to make one.”

Ilya leaned back, melting into the couch. “I am too tired for this.”

Shane giggled a little bit, and it made Ilya look over at him, surprised. He thought he would have to play the ‘wallowing in misery’ card for Shane to forgive him.

“You still going to murder me?”

Shane hummed and tilted his head back and forth in contemplation. “Well, I’m still mad, but I can’t really be mad at you for having a stalker who is a manipulative liar.”

Ilya wanted to ask why this situation specifically upset Shane so much. It’s not like it’s the first time he has had a one-night stand blasted across page one of any trash celebrity gossip magazine. He thinks he knows why, though.

They have never really talked about it before. Their future together. And really, why would they? They have always been casually together. Sure, they have an established relationship, but the suffocation of being hidden grates on Ilya with a passion.

He likes the freedom of being able to go out in public with people and kiss them under the flashing lights and the bass pulsing around them in the clubs he frequents. But he knows, deep down, that even if he and Shane were openly together, he would never be in a club with him. It’s too overstimulating for him.

If he is honest with himself, Ilya knows it’s because of the pregnancy aspect. The fear that Ilya might really be moving on from Shane because he can’t give him a family due to their careers. That thought is what ultimately makes him ask.

“Did you think I was breaking up with you?”

Shane turns away sharply and sits up straight. Like he might bolt off if the answer is affirmative.

“Are you breaking up with me?”

“Oh my god, Shane. No. And even if I was, I wouldn't do it by you finding out on magazine.”

Shane narrows his eyes and looks him over critically. The sharp gaze makes a wave of shivers run up Ilya’s body.

“If you break up with me like one of your little toys, I really will murder you.”

A laugh bursts out of his lips before he can stop it. The idea of Shane climbing him and clawing his throat out was weirdly sexy.

“Would be my pleasure to be murdered by such a beautiful boy.”

Shane humphs and stands up from the couch.

“I’m tired. Let’s go to bed.”

Ilya is so excited about that plan. It is a wonderful plan. As he stands to go hug his pouty little omega, Shane puts his hand out, stopping him. Wrinkling his freckled nose in the way Ilya is obsessed with.

“You smell like tequila.”

“I shower.”

“Good choice.”

Then he turned on his heels and slipped up the stairs to dismantle Ilya’s bed until it turned into a nest of his liking. Shane is very finicky about his nests. He will only use certain blankets and clothes that feel good on his skin. Ilya keeps a bunch of extra nesting material in a chest at the foot of his bed specifically for the fussy creature.

He would never tell Shane the real reason why he has two laundry baskets, usually saying it's for color distribution (as if Ilya actually cared about that shit), but he actually keeps a separate basket specifically for his softer clothes that he knows Shane will want to pilfer. He knows he prefers his softer shirts to pad the edges of his nest. Soaked with the alpha’s pheromones to help him relax.

He would never admit it out loud, but he does love providing that comfort for Shane. It makes him feel useful. Makes him feel like Shane trusts him enough to use the materials he provides him for such a sacred space.

By the time he finally makes it into the bedroom, showered and sporting briefs, Shane has already assembled his nest and curled up in the center, scrolling on his phone.

“So, I messaged my mom, and she said she will call your manager tomorrow morning and get it handled. You know how she is about you.”

Ilya did know. Yuna Hollander was a woman with a plan from A to Z, and she was fiercely protective of Shane and Ilya. She rarely needed to make something work past plan B.

Shane told his parents about his relationship with Ilya when they were 22. He had gotten into an accident during a game that hospitalized

him, and when Ilya showed up half feral and shaking, they really had no choice but to admit to them what they were to each other.

Ilya knew Yuna didn't approve of his extracurricular activities, but she was polite enough not to bring it up in front of him.

"I will call tomorrow to thank her."

Shane hummed and looked up at him. Ilya wondered if he was going to be forced to sleep in his guest room or if Shane would allow him into his nest. There was a tense moment before he patted the pillow on the side Ilya usually lay on.

They settled into the bed and flicked all of the lights off. Watching the streetlights project lines across the ceiling from the window shutters.

Slowly, Shane slid over and lay across his chest. Pulling Ilya's arm around his shoulders. They lay in silence while Shane twisted his fingers over the sparse chest hair. Trailing gentle kisses over Ilya's pec.

"If you get someone else pregnant, I will burn your house down."

And if Ilya wasn't already half asleep, he would have noticed the "else" in Shane's threat.

Chapter 2: The Accident

Chapter Notes

I do not speak Russian, so any Russian is either Google-translated or written in italics to signify it is being spoken in Russian. If anyone reading this DOES speak it, please correct any mistakes I made. Mostly, the only thing I will write in Cyrillic is if Ilya uses a Russian word or phrase while having an otherwise English conversation. I will put the translation in the endnote.

Thank you to everyone who left a comment on the first chapter; it made me feel super motivated to finish this. I do not have an upload schedule planned; I'll probably just post the chapters as I finish them, so if you want a notification, make sure to subscribe to the fic.

Also, I have a Twitter if anyone wants to hang out with me there. @Beef_Catalogue

(idk how to link things in ao3 and I'm not learning to code)

enjoy! :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Shane began his plan immediately upon returning home to Montreal. Seeing Ilya in person really allowed Shane to reevaluate his priorities.

The first being, he and Ilya aren't rookies anymore. He has won the cup three times now. His lifelong goal was to win it just once, but three times over? Shane could admit he has had a very successful career, especially as a rookie, and maybe now it was time to grow up.

His body wasn't going to be young, strong, and fertile forever. Waiting a few years could be detrimental to his body and his babies. Plus, if they wanted more than one, he would need to start now.

Secondly, and maybe more importantly, Shane didn't want to share his alpha anymore. Ilya was his. Ilya has been his since they were 18, and he's done letting no-name omegas attempt to claim what is rightfully his. If Ilya kept going at the rate he was, then it was only a matter of time before he actually did knock someone up.

No. Shane needed to lock Ilya down. The mere idea of Ilya leaving

because of another to take care of a mistake that Shane allowed him to make made rage bubble up from his stomach.

He still had his teeth bared in anger as he entered his bathroom and ripped open the medicine cabinet. His heat suppressants and birth control pill packet sat on the shelf as they always had. Innocent and commonplace. Shane snatched them out of the cabinet and threw them into the trash can without hesitation. Then, on second thought, he pulled them out and popped each pill out of the packaging and dropped them in the toilet. Flushing the medication felt much more permanent. He couldn't back out now.

Shane had always been anxious about getting his heat during the playoff season or during the Olympics. The thought of being stuck in bed for a week and missing out on valuable game time sent a cold shiver of terror up his spine. What would his team do without him? How would the hormones affect his concentration? He had refused to allow his body to betray him like that when he was at the peak of his career.

His mom had been understanding. When he had come to her with his fears and embarrassment at 16, fresh off his first heat, she had just hugged him and taken him to the clinic. The process was easy and normalized for omegas in sports. Nobody judged him, and his coach had even encouraged it. Hormones are a hindrance when you’re going to be competing at such a high level. Shane knew he would be a first-draft pick for the NHL. There was no reality where that didn’t happen for him.

Things have changed, though. Building a family with Ilya was more important now. What was the point of having hockey if Ilya wasn’t there to push him to be his best? The alpha was the only other player on his level; nobody else came close to keeping up with him. Maybe one day they will be able to win a cup together and celebrate with their baby. Maybe he can be there with his mate when their baby tries on their first pair of skates.

Maybe Shane could have the big family he’s always wanted. Ilya could give that to him, even if it wasn’t intentional on the Russians' part.

He is still young and healthy. He could bounce back into hockey after having a baby if he really wanted to. Other omegas have done it before in other sports. Having children wasn’t a career death anymore like it used to be. Shane is grateful for the omegas before him paving that path for him now.

He spent the day browsing omega mommy websites and filling his online shopping carts with prenatal vitamins and baby items. He had always treated his body as a temple. Taking vitamins would just add another layer to this. They were supposed to be good for omegas in general anyway. He probably should have started taking them a while ago.

He should make a spreadsheet.

Having a baby was a lot of work, but it was work that would build a strong foundation for the rest of their lives. The idea of having a baby wasn't anything new to Shane. Ilya was the one who gave him the idea in the first place. They have never talked about it together, or having a family in general, but Shane knew that having a family and settling down into a quiet, comfortable environment was the Russians' ultimate dream.

Ilya often got dreamy-eyed and sentimental when he was around other players and their WAGs. Talking boisterously about how his kids would be the best hockey players in history and how he was going to have enough to run his very own little league team. He loved playing with the kids at the yearly hockey camps the Boston rink hosted every summer or the random kids in the swimming pools when he was traveling for games. His face lit up like a million suns around the babies. Plus, Shane would be lying if he said it didn't make him aroused thinking of Ilya carrying around their own kid. Propping the baby up against his broad chest and carting it around in a backpack.

It was sweet how much Ilya loved children. It made Shane feel warm and fuzzy thinking about giving that to him. Giving his alpha a baby that was the perfect combination of them both.

Even if he didn't ask for it.

But Shane knew Ilya would forgive him, and really, explaining away an accidental pregnancy would be easy. Chemical contraception was never one hundred percent effective, and Ilya often "forgot" to use condoms as it was. The decade of fucking raw hadn't resulted in a pregnancy scare yet, and the alpha wasn't often in the business of thinking too hard about safe sex when Shane was lounging in his nest naked.

Shane knew Ilya was too possessive of him to ever abandon him or their child. Honestly, it might finally kick him in the ass to mate Shane and force them to get married. The idea of having Ilya's teeth

imprinted on his neck made him squeeze his thighs together. It would be delicious to be claimed so boldly. His teeth in his neck and his ring glittering on his finger.

Those whores that hung off of his alpha lost in the dust of their love and devotion.

It almost made Shane feel high. The freedom this decision gives him. No more secrets, no more hiding, no more putting up with stupid pick-mes who didn't know when to quit. Ilya would belong to Shane very publicly. He would belong to him in the most intimate way. A way that can't be broken with modern-day medical science.

Bonding bites have long been able to be reversed, but you can't reverse a baby. That would tie them together forever.

Maybe Shane should send Carter Moses a gift basket. He never would have decided on this plan without that loser trying to take his alpha. Maybe Shane should also feel bad that he was going to baby trap Ilya the same way the other omega was, but Shane felt shame about a lot of things in his life, and realistically, having Ilya's baby was not going to be one of them. Even if he wasn't in on the plan. That's not really Shane's problem though.

They had been professional long enough to accumulate enough money and status to be comfortable even if Shane never returned to hockey. They have been veteran players long enough to create professional relationships that could protect them from negative repercussions as well. Making a scene to ruin either of their careers would be a disaster for those people.

With 4 cups between them, nobody else could really compete with their accomplishments. They were highly valuable players to the league. And really, what could anyone even say to make him look bad? Oh no, a mated omega has a baby? The public would rip them to shreds.

Regardless, Shane was still a bit scared to go through with this plan. There are a lot of cons. But he has always been good at math, and the pros definitely outweigh the cons in this situation.

He knows; he made a list.

All that was really left for Shane to do was wait for the chemicals to leave his system. He hadn't had a heat since he graduated high school. It kind of terrified him that his heat could come back with a

viciousness, but knowing his alpha would never leave him to suffer through it alone made it worth it.

Ilya never said it to his face, but he knew he felt feral at the thought of sharing Shane's heat. Every time he brought it up in passing, the alphas' eyes grew darker and predatory. Like he couldn't wait to press Shane into the closest flat surface and defile him.

No, convincing Ilya wouldn't be a problem.

The date for his ultimate move would be Ilya's birthday. It was in 5 weeks, and that should be long enough for Shane's hormones to start coming back, according to the internet. What could possibly be a better birthday gift than bending his omega over every surface of his fancy house?

Honestly, Shane should be given an award for his effort.

___

After Shane left Boston, Ilya immediately called his agent. Simon wasn't the most flashy guy, but he had come highly recommended to him as a rookie since he also spoke Russian. It made Ilya feel significantly better to work with someone who wouldn't misunderstand him. His English was much better than when he was drafted into Boston, but being misconstrued was one of Ilya's worst nightmares.

Simon answered his call on the second ring and immediately launched into questions. "*Rozanov! I was about to call you. Have you seen the fucking tabloids? Is it true?"*

Ilya just sighed and rubbed his eyes.

"Yes, I have seen the magazine. Someone showed it to me last night. And no, it is definitely not true. I need you to tell Carter to fuck off."

Simon made an affronted noise over the receiver. It sounded like he was walking around outside. The wind was whipping into the microphone and battering Ilya's eardrum.

"*Jesus, Simon, where are you? What are you doing? It's loud as hell over the line."*

The older man just hummed again, and Ilya could hear him typing something. *"I am on my way to meet with Carter Moses' manager. I'm*

going to make him retract his statement, or I will threaten to sue him for breaking and entering your apartment."

Ilya blinked, confused. "*How do you know he was in my apartment?"*

Simon scoffed like it was a stupid question. "*Yuna Hollander messaged me last night saying you told her someone broke into your house."*

"Ah, I forgot I told her that. I'm hungover as fuck." He forgot that Shane talked to his mom last night.

Simon just laughed. He had heard a cafe bell tinkle over the phone before he told Ilya he would call him back after the meeting to let him know what settlement had been made. Ilya should probably call the team lawyer, too, but honestly, he was too exhausted to care. Simon would do it for him anyway if the meeting went south.

Shane woke him up at 5 am that morning. He had a flight at 8 am, and he refused to leave Boston without Ilya drilling him into their mattress.

And because Ilya is such a loving boyfriend, he did just that.

Shane had woken up before him and sleepily scooted backward until his ass pressed up against Ilya's crotch. Slowly grinding against him until Ilya gasped and woke up to clutch the smaller man to him. Pressing his hips tightly to his plush ass.

Shane was still soft and sleepy when he wiggled his pajama shorts down to his knees. Flopping over onto his stomach and looking over at Ilya with big, heavy eyes. It was almost painful to look at him. The moonlight caressed his skin in loving strokes. It made Ilya want to bite.

He rolled over so he was covering the omega's smaller form and relaxed his whole body weight into him. Shane let out a wheeze, but his body melted into the sheets shortly after.

Shane loved being pressed down. Suffocated. He said it made him feel safe, cozy. Ilya didn't understand the appeal, but he would happily lay his dead weight onto Shane if he asked nicely.

And oh, was he asking so nicely. His sweet little noises made Ilya ache. Shifting his hips against Shane's plump, round ass was heaven. It barely took any effort for him to lower the waistband of his shorts and let his half-hard cock roll out.

Shane made a soft gasping sound when he felt the weight of it on his lower back. “Is what you want, котёнок?”

He hummed and pressed his hips back into Ilya with a lazy grind. “I want.” He whimpered back.

Ilya dropped his hand down near Shane’s head to support his weight as he ran his other hand down Shane’s back. His skin was so soft. Small freckles dotted his skin like secret constellations that only Ilya knew the pattern of.

The boy was unreal in his beauty. It made Ilya feel possessive as he pulled Shane’s cheek aside to peer down at his hole. The pretty pink pucker winking at him as the cold air of the room invaded his most private place.

It was an impossible task not to touch it. He ran his thumb over the bud before gently rubbing circles into it to loosen the muscles. It had been a while since they last fucked, and Ilya knew Shane didn’t have any hookups, unlike him.

Shane was so perfect. Pure. Only for Ilya’s hands. Nobody else deserved him. They wouldn’t know how to handle him, how to give him what he craved when he couldn’t ask for it

Shane whined as Ilya started prodding his hole with his finger. It was easy to slip the first digit in. The boy had already started leaking slick. Rolling down his taint to settle in the bed underneath him. It smelled phenomenal. The soft minty scent combined with Ilya’s own burnt amber.

It reminded him of their first meeting outside of the junior league match. Shane’s scent had blown in the frigid wind towards him and mingled with the acrid scent of Ilya’s cigarette. Ilya had never seen a more beautiful boy in his life.

By the time Shane was trembling on three of Ilya’s thick fingers, he started swatting his hand backwards to smack at Ilya’s chest.

Shane got like this sometimes. When the pleasure was too good and the feelings too overwhelming, he stopped speaking. Communication became impossible for his little kitten. The only way to convey his needs was with his body.

“Okay, okay. I know what you need.”

Shane stopped flailing and curled his arms back up under his chest, pushing his body up into Ilya. The sight of Shane with his face pressed into Ilya's favorite pillow and his ass in the air on full display made him growl. His chest vibrated with need as he leaned down to nuzzle into his omega's neck.

He could feel his control starting to slip as he thrust his cock over Shane's hole. Not breaching yet, just rutting against the soft skin. The slick kept dripping from his hole, making the glide heavenly. The third stroke caused his cockhead to catch, making both of them moan into the silence of the room.

Ilya couldn't help it as he pressed in. He did it too fast, and he could tell Shane wasn't ready by the gasp he hiccupped into the bedding. But he couldn't stop the small grind that followed his bottoming out. He was so deep he could feel the head kissing Shane's cervix.

He stopped to catch his breath. Huffing heavily into the back of Shane's hair. Trying to hold himself back from pumping his load into the tight, needy hole immediately.

"*Move,"* Shane growled out in Russian.

The word in his mother tongue made Ilya's lips stutter unconsciously. It was over for him after that. He sat up fully and yanked his omega into a full mating press and slammed his hips forward. Ilya loved how his thumbs fit into the dimples at the back of Shane's spine. Like he was made specifically for the Russian to fuck him this way. It was obscene how his hands almost fully wrapped around his waist. So small and slutty. Begging for Ilya to grab and claim.

Shane was scrambling for the headboard, something to anchor himself to, as Ilya slammed into him at a rapid pace. If he had wanted a slow morning fuck, he shouldn't have teased the alpha so much.

It was over before it really started. Both of them were too pent up over the weeks they spent apart. Shane was trembling with his face pressed into one of Ilya's shirts he had fished out of the nest, making punched-out little sounds each time their hips met. Ilya could feel the building heat low in his stomach. He knew he needed to get Shane off first.

He leaned forward and plastered his body over Shane's back. Wiggling a hand between the bed and his hips to grasp Shane's small omega cock. He only had to pump his little handful twice before the smaller man convulsed underneath him and moaned loudly into the bedding.

Ilya barely made it a few pumps before he spilled inside Shane as well. His hole clamps down like a vise during his orgasm. Ilya jammed his fist between his teeth, biting down until copper flooded his mouth. Staring at the nape of Shane's beautiful neck the whole time.

He pulled out carefully, conscious of how sensitive Shane got after sex. He would need a moment to compose himself. Ilya got up to clean them off. Finding a soft washcloth that he bought specifically for the purpose of wiping down his overstimulated omega.

He relaxed back into bed after throwing the washcloth onto the floor, somewhere in the direction of the laundry basket. Shane would complain about it later, but for now, he had curled up on Ilya's chest and was quietly purring in contentment. Kneading his hand on Ilya's pec.

Cute.

___

Two weeks after Shane stopped taking his pills, he could feel his body start to bloom. He could smell himself after practice, the heavy exercise forcing his body to work out his hormones until they wafted around him gently. The refreshing wintergreen scent started sticking to everything.

JJ was the first person to mention it. He skated up to Shane after practice and sniffed his shoulder pad. "Why do you smell like Christmas?"

Shane startled and looked over at him. "Uh, I don't know. I assumed I smelled like sweat."

JJ laughed, "Well, yes. But also very minty. Like breath candy."

Shane reached up to his neck and realized his scent patch had peeled off and was probably lost somewhere in his padding.

"Ah, sorry. My patch must have fallen off."

The alpha's eyes went wide. "Oh, is okay! At least you smell nice. When Pike's fell off last practice, I almost died."

Across the ice, Hayden must have heard the chirp because he yelled

across the space that Jackie found his scent wonderful, thank you very much!

Scent patches were a requirement for all professional athletes. Most were on suppressants, but for the players that weren't, it just made it easier to concentrate when other players weren't leaking their scents all over the ice. Especially because the NHL was mostly alphas, the overload of pheromones would definitely cause more fights than there already were.

Shane changed his patch after showering and pressed around all of the edges so it wouldn't peel off again. They were supposed to be sweatproof, but that was unrealistic for most hockey players. Almost all of their patches were sliding and peeling by the end of practice.

He might need to be more careful. Shane didn't want anyone else except Ilya to know what he was doing.

—

One week before Ilya's birthday, Montreal and Boston had a game. Montreal was leading in the tournament standings. If they beat Boston, it would just be the Admirals between them and the cup.

Ilya wasn't sure why, but he felt more on edge than usual. He wasn't worried about the game. Whoever won, he knew they would have earned it, but the grating anxiety persisted through routine stretches and pregame speeches.

He had seen Shane before the game. They always met in the east wing bathroom at Boston's home rink. It was a less-used wing, and it gave them enough privacy to talk before the face-off.

Shane had been normal. Or at least that's how he pretended to feel when Ilya asked him if he was okay. The smaller man was jittery. Rolling on his skates and fidgeting with the tape on his stick. Shane wasn't usually a fidgeter unless he was anxious, and he didn't usually get anxious before games anymore.

So obviously, the omega was hiding something from him. Ilya knew him well enough not to push. At least not yet. Shane was a skittish creature at the best of times; pushing his clear set boundaries now would only cause him to withdraw and run away.

He did notice he was sweating a lot more than normal. The rink was cold, as it always was, and Shane hadn't even done his warm-up skate by the time they met. He shouldn't be dripping sweat from his temples. It made Ilya edgy. He didn't like it when his omega was sick. It made his instincts hackle. It made him feel like he needed to pick Shane up, swaddle him in blankets, and hide him in his house until he was better.

Of course, Shane denied feeling bad in any way. He had huffed and puffed about Ilya being a worrywart and bullied his way into the bigger man's arms. Nuzzling his nose directly into his neck, inhaling his dampened scent from above his scent patch. Not something they typically did before games, but Ilya wasn't one to look a gift horse in the mouth. If Shane needed cuddles before they kicked each other's ass, then that's what he would give him.

Hindsight feels like 20/20 as Ilya watches Shane lose focus while running with the puck and get slammed into the boards by Harlow.

The hit was clean, but watching Shane crumble onto the ice and not get back up has red seeping into his vision. Ilya gets to Shane at the same time Pike slams into Harlow while flinging his gloves. The fight causes other players to jump in, pulling and hitting each other like wild animals.

"Hollander!"

He skids to a stop and slides the rest of the way to him on his knees. Not wanting to risk falling over his prone body and injuring him more. Ilya carefully turns him from his side to his back and pulls off his helmet. Ilya can hear the commotion of people in sneakers scrambling onto the ice, but the sight of Shane unconscious with his nose bleeding down the side of his beautiful face makes his ears ring. There is a nasty slice across the top of his delicate nose bridge, and his nose is gushing blood from the impact. Ilya can see bruising starting to develop where his helmet's visor pushed into his face below his eyes.

He's holding Shane's neck steady by the time the paramedics get to them. They are yelling at him to move out of the way, but all he can hear is the blood pounding in his ears. Someone pushes him away while the medics surround Shane. Forcing Ilya to watch from a distance as they lifted Shane's limp body onto the transfer board.

It's not until they have left the ice that sound comes rushing back to

Ilya. Andrei, his defenseman, is holding his arm still. Talking to him in a calm tone, like he's a scared animal. The buzzer startles them, and everyone is told to clear the ice. They have to clean the blood off of it.

Ilya thinks he might throw up.

He can't leave. Nobody knows who Shane is to him except a rival. They don't know that Ilya just watched his whole world go limp and unresponsive. His coach seems to realize that he's in no condition to play because he is benched for the rest of the 3rd quarter.

By the time the buzzer sounded for the last goal, Ilya was already running out of the box and down the hallway to the locker room. He doesn't know who won, and he doesn't give a shit either.

When the rest of his team comes slamming into the locker room, cheering for their apparent victory, Ilya is already in his casual clothes and pushing past them to get out the door.

He knows his coach is going to have something to say about his behavior. He is the captain; he should be there to congratulate and pop the champagne. They beat the Metros. They will play the Admirals and win the cup. But they didn't win it fairly. Winning a game because the star player of the opposing team was carted off the ice on a stretcher was nothing to celebrate.

Ilya has Yuna Hollander on the phone before he has even reached the parking lot.

"What hospital?"

He doesn't need to elaborate. He knows she was watching and that she was Shane's emergency contact.

"Boston General. They just took him into triage. He's still unconscious."

Ilya can hear the tremors in her voice. The fear was radiating through the phone.

"I will be there. Five minutes."

The hospital is at least 15 minutes away, but Ilya didn't pay half a million dollars for a sports car for nothing.

He made it in six minutes.

Shane was awake by the time he made it into the private hospital room, though he didn't seem fully lucid. His parents were sitting on the far side of the bed, carefully holding Shane's hand that didn't have an IV in it. Yuna looked relieved to see Ilya burst into the room. David just looked exhausted. Shane had no immediate reaction.

Shane didn't react until Ilya was right next to him and grabbing the blanket in his fist near his feet.

"Ilya!" He smiled dopily. His nose was splinted and obviously still broken, and the bruising across his nose bridge and under his eyes had started to develop.

It took several deep breaths before Ilya could piece together a coherent sentence.

"You scared me, Солнышко. I saw Marlow hit you and—" Ilya had to stop so he didn't choke on a sob.

Shane was obviously high on whatever drugs they had given him for the pain. He just smiled up at Ilya with a crooked grin. "I don't remember that!" He said happily.

Ilya let out a surprised laugh. "Yes. Well, I will remember for both of us. Forever."

He would be lucky to get the image out of his head.

They were interrupted when a nurse knocked on the door, followed by a doctor. They greeted everyone briefly before looking over at Shane. The nurse came to his side and took his vitals. She was messing with the machines when the doctor spoke.

"Well," the doctor said to the room at large, "I have good news and bad news. The good news is that Shane is very lucky. He only has mild symptoms of a concussion, and besides a broken nose and some facial swelling, the X-rays don't show any other signs of orbital damage."

Everyone let out a sigh of relief at that information. "He did not remember getting hit," Ilya said. This concerned him. The doctor nodded. "He got his bell rung pretty good. Short-term memory loss is normal. He was able to answer cognitive questions and pass them, so I am not too worried about long-term memory issues." That made Ilya feel better at least. It was probably for the best that Shane didn't remember getting smashed into the boards face-first anyway.

He looked over at Shane, who was busy staring at the ceiling tiles.

“And the bad news?” Yuna probed.

“The bad news is that his left clavicle and left wrist are broken. He has a mid-shaft hairline fracture in his clavicle and a Smith's fracture in his wrist. Basically, meaning the middle of his collarbone was broken, but it was a clean break. No pieces of bone broke off, and his wrist was fractured towards his palm. Most likely due to catching himself as he fell. He will need a few more X-rays, but from the preliminary screening, I don’t think surgery will be necessary.”

Ilya looked over at Shane’s parents. David looked pale, like he was about to pass out, and Yuna looked green, like she was about to vomit.

Shane had fallen asleep sometime in the past few minutes. His mouth was hanging open, and his head tilted back over his pillow, probably for the best. He wasn’t really aware of what was going on right now anyway. Not with all of the pain meds running through his system.

“Okay. What is treatment plan?” Ilya needed to know what he would need to help Shane with to make sure he heals properly. Shane is a freak about his health and diet, but he was stubborn when it came to being injured. He always pushed too hard, too fast.

“Luckily, it’s pretty straightforward. He will need a sling to support and stabilize his shoulder while his clavicle heals, and I will put a cast on his wrist. The wrist will need to be reset into place and stabilized. It’s not surgery, but I will sedate him while I reset and cast it so he isn’t in any pain.”

Yuna nodded and patted David on the back.

“What is the timeline like for healing?”

The doctor hummed thoughtfully. “Well, the X-rays so far are promising. Nothing was broken too severely. His wrist will probably be in a cast for 6-7 weeks. Depending on how it heals, we will move on to physical therapy. That can take roughly two months, depending on his dedication.”

“He will do it. I’ll make sure.” Ilya clenched his fingers around the handles at the bottom of the bed frame. Knuckles strained white from the grip.

“Wonderful! Therapy works best when there is motivation to do it consistently. His clavicle should heal in 3-4 weeks, depending on mobility. The hardest part of that will be moving the shoulder after several weeks of stabilization.”

The doctor went over a few more things with Shane’s parents, but Ilya was too strung out with stress to pay attention anymore. He slumped down into the chair in the corner of the room and rested his face in his hands.

It could’ve been worse. All things considered, Shane got away basically unscathed with how hard he was hit.

“Also, before I forget!” The doctor pulled out a small stack of papers. “His records show that he has a prescription for heat suppressants and birth control, but his labs show he has no altering chemicals in his system. Did he mention stopping these medications to you?”

Ilya froze; he could feel his fingers start to go numb, dread dripping down his spine like venom, as Yuna told the doctor she had no idea why he stopped taking them.

This was Ilya’s fault.

It all made sense now. Shane was sweating so profusely for no reason, and he was unable to concentrate. His jitters and fidgeting. Forcing his way into Ilya’s arms like he was starved for affection. Shane stopped taking his heat suppressant.

Shane was going to leave him.

The omega had told him once, as a casual threat, that if Ilya ever got a babymama, he would leave him for an alpha who would treat him right, who prioritized him over childish vices like cars, clubs, and casual fucks. He had been joking at the time. Ilya was sure of that, but maybe he wasn't joking anymore. What other reason would he have for stopping his meds?

“We will need to get his consent to start them again, but he is fairly close to a heat if his labs are any indication.”

“No.”

Everyone turned to look at him, surprised at his rough tone. Ilya shook his head, rubbing his hands across his face and up to grab his hair. Raking his fingers through the curls harshly. This was insane. He

couldn't handle losing Shane. The omega was the only reason why he even bothered to play hockey anymore. He couldn't care less about Boston or his career.

Shane was the only reason Ilya was still here; he was the only reason Ilya hadn't already joined his mother.

“No meds. We are trying for a baby.”

The following silence was deafening.

“What?” David whispered.

“We were not going to tell anyone until we knew if it took,” Ilya lied through his teeth. He shouldn’t be lying to Shane’s parents, but he refused to let Shane leave him. If he wanted to leave Ilya, he would have to be the one to explain to his parents why and ruin their hope for grandkids.

Maybe Ilya was a bad person.

“Well, that changes things,” the doctor muttered to herself. She shuffled some papers. “We will need to change some medications so nothing will disrupt his fertility. I'll talk to him when he wakes up.”

“No! I mean—no, please don't. He doesn’t want anyone to know. I would not have told if this didn’t happen. He wants it to be surprise. Please, do not ruin that for him.”

He couldn’t let Shane know that he knew. He needed to make sure he fucked a baby into him before he could escape.

The doctor hesitated and looked over at Shane's parents for confirmation. Yuna was crying and grasping David's arm in a crushing grip. She was looking at Ilya like he had given her a gift. “A baby,” she whispered to herself. She nodded. “We will keep this a secret. I don’t want him to stress out about us knowing. He needs to heal and be healthy to have a better chance of conceiving,” she sobbed.

The doctor finished her paperwork, and the nurse released Shane’s bed to be taken for his wrist resetting. The room was silent as his bed was wheeled away.

Chapter End Notes

котёнок = kitten

Солнышко = Little sun/sunshine

Chapter 3: Heat(ed Rivalry)

Chapter Notes

> About halfway through this chapter I realized I have completely deviated from my original plot plan because Ilya keeps being a little shit. Anyway, I think I like the new direction better anyway.
>
> I also realized that this fic is going to be sooooo long because we're 14k words in and Shane isn't even pregnant yet 😩. This chapter is about 6,500 words, so we're getting there, but realistically I have no idea how many chapters there will be. This fic is basically writing itself at this point, so we're all just along for the ride.
>
> Please read the new tags I've added. If you're here, you're probably ok with freaky sex, but I still tagged it. This chapter is mostly horny ngl. There is a moment at the end that could seem kind of noncon, but it's literally only bc these 2 idiots refuse to use their big boy words. Both of them want it; they just are bad at communication.
>
> Thank you for reading and all of your wonderful comments. They made me laugh and feel validated in my freak4freak agenda.
>
> EDIT: I fixed the spacing issue. I am not sure why it reformatted; thanks to the people who let me know.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The next time Shane woke up, he felt numb and tingly. Something heavy was on his left arm, and he couldn't move it at all. He looked over to the side and saw his parents sitting in the uncomfortable chairs pulled up to his bed. His father was snoring quietly in one chair, but his mom smiled over at him with watery, tired eyes when she saw he was awake.

"What happen'?" His mouth felt full of cotton.

His mom got up to bring a paper cup to his lips. Stroking his hair gently as he drained the water. "What do you remember, baby?" She sat down on his bed, patting his knee.

"Umm, I was skating. I think I got hit by a car?" His mom let out a weak laugh. "No, you got cross-checked by Marlow of the Boston

Raiders. Do you remember that?”

Now that she mentioned it, Shane does vaguely remember the defender slamming him into the boards. He remembers hearing someone calling his name, and he remembers the sound of sirens, but that's about it. His face must have offered some sort of confirmation because his mom did not push it further.

She cleared her throat. “So, the doctor reset your wrist and nose. You broke both, as well as your left collarbone.” That explained why his arm felt so heavy. “That sucks.” She laughed, surprised at his casual demeanor.

“Yes, but it could have been worse. You should be fine in 3 to 4 months.”

Shane sighed. That meant he was out for the rest of the season. “Did we win?”

His mom shook her head no, and really, he expected it. Shane loved his team, but he wasn't deluded enough to think they could win against Boston without him. “Ilya is going to be such an asshole about this.”

Something in his mom’s face made him furrow his brow. “What?”

She shrugged. “He has already been by to see you. He was very upset and worried. Got here before they took you back to get fixed up.” Shane looked around the room, frowning when he didn't see the hulking shoulders of his alpha. His mom must have noticed because she elaborated on his absence. “I sent him to go get dinner for everyone. I think he needed a task to get his mind off worrying about you.” Shane hummed. She was probably right. Ilya was a man of action; being given a reason to move was better than letting him stew in stress at the unknown.

When Ilya got back, everyone ate in relative silence. The lights had been dimmed to accommodate Shane's concussion, and the silence hung heavily in the dark room. Something happened when Shane was unconscious; he just couldn’t figure out what. Ilya and his parents got along great normally. It didn't seem like anyone had argued, but his parents were weirdly quiet. His mom especially.

He had never known her to sit in silence with company. She was as lively as Ilya was, who was also strangely quiet. He sat in the chair on the opposite side of Shane’s bed from his parents. Eating his food with

a dazed look that made Shane worry. His hair was disheveled in a way it only ever got after Shane spent the night running his fingers through it. The golden curls were frizzy and clumped from sweat against his temples.

He obviously hadn't showered before coming to the hospital after the game.

"Am I dying?"

Everyone looks up at him, startled at his question.

"Shane, why would you say that?" His mom said, reaching for his hand with a concerned look on her face.

"Because everyone is acting really weird right now, and I don't know why. Why is everyone more upset about my broken arm than me?"

Ilya reached across the bed and grabbed Shane's leg, squeezing his thigh above the knee. His big, warm hand made something in Shane's chest release a bit. Ilya hadn't touched him since he came back with food.

"You are not dying. You are not allowed to die, unless I kill you," the Russian said with an ironclad conviction.

Shane snorted; he would blame the meds for his poor judgment. Shane's mother made a strangled sound. "Ilya! You cannot kill my son for no reason."

Ilya just waved his free hand in the air like he was batting away her words. "Da, I would have very good reason. Like if he makes stupid choice of letting Hayden be his best friend."

Shane couldn't help the laugh that burst from his lips. "Hayden is already my best friend."

Ilya nods solemnly. "Yes, is why your days are numbered." Shane threw a broccoli floret at him.

Yuna threw her hands into the air and looked at her husband. "Why are you not saying anything?" He just shrugged, "Ilya is my favorite son." Shane gasps in mock horror while Ilya laughs and squeezes Shane's knee.

Yuna looks annoyed but fond. "I'm surrounded by idiots."

“Well, I will die eventually.”

Ilys shook his head no and schooled his smile, glaring at him through his eyelashes. His hazel eyes looked darker than usual in the low light of the room. It made Shane feel like prey. But he just giggled and pressed his knee further into Ilya’s hand, enjoying the heavy weight.

Shane's parents eventually had to leave, citing early flights. They had only come down to watch his game because they were going to an opera in the city. An opera they missed due to Shane getting injured. His mom was probably just biding her time before she complained about it to him. They hugged him and Ilya before closing his suite door as they left, leaving Shane to stare at Ilya in the darkness.

Neither of them moved or said anything for a long while. Shane wasn’t really sure what to say, and now that he was more lucid, he was terrified that his secret had been exposed. His parents hadn't said anything about it, though, so maybe the doctor hadn't released information to them about his lab tests. He was sure it came back negative for his heat suppressant.

He hoped that they were just waiting to ask him when he was able to provide informed consent. Hopefully, after Ilya had left.

“You will be released tomorrow morning,” Ilya said suddenly.

“Okay.”

“You will come home with me. Yuna does not want you to be alone, and I help with your rehab.” Ilya leaned back in his chair, but he still kept a sharp gaze on Shane. It made him feel like he didn’t have a say in this arrangement. It also made him worried about talking to the doctors privately without raising Ilyas's suspicion.

“I have to go home to schedule medical leave with my team.” Shane tried to reason.

Ilya just shook his head. “No, Yuna already did that. You are on leave until cleared by doctor.”

Shane should have expected that. His mom had always run his career like the Navy. His teammates teased him about having a momager, but he would rather work with her than someone who he couldn't trust to understand him and his quirks.

“What if I don’t want to go home with you?” Shane edged. Narrowing

his eyes at the alpha. This situation was spiraling away from him fast.

Ilya rumbled a snarl deep in his throat. It made Shane tense a bit, lowering his gaze in deference. Ilya never snarled or growled at him unless it was playful; this felt decidedly serious. A big shift from the tone of their earlier camaraderie.

“You will come home with me.”

It wasn’t an order, but it wasn’t not one either. He said it like a statement, as if there was no other viable option. Luckily, Shane actually did want to go home with him. He just didn’t want Ilya to think he was going to go along easily. Shane rolled his eyes and immediately regretted it as his head started to throb.

Ilya saw his eye roll and smirked. “Do not be brat, Shane Hollander. I will take care of you.”

Shane believed him, and that's what scared him.

___

Shane loved Ilya’s house in the Boston suburbs. It was quiet here. The neighborhood was safe and mostly filled with working adults and their families. Although Ilya doesn’t spend much time here, it is clean and organized, which puts Shane at ease. He hates mess, but Ilya knew that.

It was also filled with creature comforts specifically tailored to Shane and his preferences. Ilya had a large selection of cushions, pillows, and blankets for Shane to use whenever he wanted, so the first thing he did when they got to the house was raid the linen closet and make a nest on the living room couch. It was harder than usual to maneuver the materials where he wanted. Using one arm and having sore shoulders was a nightmare for quality nesting.

Ilya stood in the doorway watching him struggle with a particularly heavy weighted blanket.

“Are you just going to stand there, or are you going to help me?” Shane huffed.

“Do you want help?”

Shane thought about it; usually, he would have said no. He didn't like Ilya getting in his way with his outrageously large body when he was trying to smush everything into place, but he wanted Ilya in his nest, and he wanted to lie down.

“Yes, but you can only do what I tell you.”

Ilya laughed loudly, the sound echoing in the room. “Shane, this is our whole relationship. You tell me what to do, and I listen.”

Shane sighed, “Just move this over there, please.” He pointed. Ilya complied and took the blanket from his hand, brushing his fingers over Shane’s knuckles. The nest was built quickly after that. Shane sat in the center and instructed the alpha on where to move things. It was almost perfect.

Almost.

“Take off your shirt,” and then, after some consideration, “your pants too.”

Ilya smirked at him and did as he was told. He pulled the t-shirt over his head, giving Shane a glorious view of his torso. It was annoying how well-built Ilya was. Like someone had chiseled him out of marble. He popped the button in his jeans; Shane had to take a deep breath.

He had seen the alpha naked and in various stages of dress hundreds of times, but it never stopped making him feel hot and bothered about it. After having a taste of Ilya, it just made the flex of his muscles so much more enticing. He knew what they could do to him. How they could manhandle and hold him wherever he wanted to, like he was a doll.

The illusion was shattered when he threw his clothes at Shane, and they landed over his face. He squawked and pulled them off, making his hair puff up stupidly from the static, and he glared at Ilya, who just laughed and crowded him into the nest.

Shane hissed and smacked at him with his one good hand, “No, no, no! I’m not done organizing!” Ilya just growled back playfully, snapping his big fangs at Shane as he took his clothes from him, throwing them behind himself as he lay across Shane’s legs and nuzzled under his shirt into his stomach.

“Why did you throw them? I wanted to use those.” Shane mumbled, pouting.

Ilya just grunted and wiggled closer. “Why do you need clothes if I’m right here? Is better than clothing, yes?” He inhaled the soft skin of Shane’s tummy and licked into his belly button because he liked how Shane squealed about it.

“Are you jealous of your own clothing?” Shane asked, amused by the possessive behavior. Ilya just grunted and squeezed Shane's hips.

Ilya could smell the heat on his skin now; it burned deep inside of the omega, biding its time before it broke through and forced Shane to submit to his biology. It made his sweet wintergreen scent warmer and more cloying than usual. It added notes of burnt sugar that made Ilya’s mouth water. He couldn’t help himself; he sucked a bruise into Shane’s hip, tongue lapping over the soft skin lazily.

Shane grabbed his hair and pulled it back, forcing their eyes to meet. His pupils were blown out wide. The whole iris shrank down into a thin circle of chocolate brown. “I should shower,” Shane whispered into the space between them.

Ilya hummed, considering. Shane hadn’t gotten to shower since he left the hospital; Ilya had left him the day before to get his house ready to welcome him home and was finally able to clean himself up after leaving the ice rink. It was probably gross, but Ilya loved it when Shane hadn’t showered after a game. The smell of his healthy sweat and his pheromones sat intoxicatingly on his skin. Like after they had made love and clung to each other.

“Later, I want to hold you right now.”

Shane made an annoyed noise, but he didn’t protest much. Usually, he would immediately demand a shower, but with his wrist and shoulder aching and needing to be wrapped in plastic before he could get onto one, he simply didn’t have enough energy. He scooted down the couch until he was completely flat, letting Ilya’s weight push him deeper into the cushions.

Maybe a nap first wouldn’t be so bad.

—

Shane woke up some time later feeling suffocated and sweaty. Everything was too hot, too scratchy, too much. Ilya was fully pressed up behind him now, spooning Shane against the back of the sofa, making the leather stick to his skin uncomfortably.

It took his sleep-addled mind a while to realize the heat was coming from inside of him. Burning through his stomach into the rest of his body. Once he noticed it, it was impossible to ignore. He can feel the sweat slicking his whole body now, beading on his forehead as he presses it into the soft leather of the couch.

Something is wrong.

He whines high and breathy, the sound jolting Ilya from his sleep. The distressing sound is like an alarm to the alpha. His sweet, caring alpha immediately scooted away to turn Shane onto his back.

Being moved just made the situation worse. He had sweated through his shirt, making the normally soft fabric cling to his skin uncomfortably. The sweats he had on were now twisted around his legs, and it made him feel like he was wearing a straitjacket. His arm being pressed to his chest made the suffocating feeling worse.

“Off! Off off off, alpha off!” Shane whined, growing more stressed and high-pitched as he failed in his desperate attempt to push the clothing off, but was unable to do anything with his left arm in a sling.

He heard a loud ripping noise, and then all of a sudden, he had sweet relief. If Ilya had ripped his shirt off in any other situation, Shane would be annoyed, but the cool air from the living room was finally able to reach the burn of his skin. All Shane could do was pant. He didn’t realize he was whining until Ilya came back to him and nuzzled his face, crooning softly to calm the omega down. Rubbing their cheeks together, letting the burn of Ilya’s stubble grate on his skin.

“You are okay, солнышко, I have you. You are safe, моя любовь.”

The relief Shane felt from losing his clothing was short-lived. Ilya had barely peeled off Shane’s pants and underwear before the heat overtook him again. Blurring his vision and making rational thought impossible.

He could hear Ilya talking to him, but it sounded far away, like he was

hearing it in a dream. Then all of a sudden, he was being picked up and carried somewhere.

No lights were turned on, so it took Shane longer to orient himself once he was set down in the bathtub. Ilya must have left at some point to start it because the porcelain was filled halfway with lukewarm water when he was placed down on the edge. The water felt like heaven on his overheated skin. Ilya must have noticed Shane sliding down into the tub because all of a sudden, he had hands pulling him back out and making him sit on the edge again. “Stay still,” he growled.

He heard the rustling of plastic and the familiar screech of tape before Shane felt the big hands unclasping the sling from around his neck. His arm was held steady in another hand as the fabric was tossed somewhere else in the bathroom.

“You’re making a mess,” Shane whined, but he wasn’t sure if it came out as real words. Nothing felt real right now.

Ilya must have said something in response, but all rational thought left his mind when he was lowered into the water. It was glorious. He could feel the heat being leached from his skin and heating the water around him. Shane felt like one of those boiling rocks they give you at fancy restaurants when you order soup.

“Why are you talking about rocks?” Ilya muttered behind him.

Shane ignored him and slid lower into the water. He didn’t have time for stupid questions when he was melting.

Shane isn't sure when he fell asleep, but the next time he opened his eyes, he realized he was sitting on the cold tile of the bathroom floor in a fluffy towel, watching Ilya rummage through the cabinets under his sink.

“Wha’s happening?” Ilya startled and looked over at him. He quickly found whatever he was looking for and returned to Shane’s side.

“Hi, you awake now?” He pressed the back of his hand against Shane’s forehead and frowned.

Shane heard a beep, and he realized Ilya had been looking for a thermometer.

“You’re in heat.”

Shane just stared at him with wide, confused eyes. The concussion really could not be helping this situation.

“Huh?” He said intelligently.

Ilya just sighed and gently pet the back of his knuckles over Shane’s cheek. “You are in heat, принцесса. Can you tell me how this happened?”

Shane stared at him in confusion for a long moment until his memories came rushing back to him.

Oh, right, *the plan.* The plan he so carefully curated to make Ilya his. That plan. The plan that has now been ruined by stupid Marlow.

Shane hated it when his plans got changed. He made a spreadsheet for fucks sake!

Ilya must have noticed a change on his face because he raised his eyebrows and settled into a crouch in front of Shane. Waiting to hear his answer.

“Uh, I ran out of my suppressants. I forgot to get them refilled.” Shane was a horrible liar.

Ilya nodded sarcastically. “Right,” he said. Looking at Shane, like he was a horrible liar.

But weirdly, Ilya didn’t press the issue. He just shrugged, rolling his big shoulders before standing up and putting the thermometer on the vanity. Shane thought he should probably question that, but before he could get his brain to come up with words, Ilya had already turned back around and carefully picked Shane up from the floor like he weighed nothing. Carrying him into his bedroom.

It wasn’t until Ilya lay him down in the bed that he realized it was still set up in the nest he had created several weeks ago. Ilya never took it apart and washed everything. Normally, Shane would find that gross, they fucked in this nest, but his heat-addled mind purred in contentment. His alpha liked his nest. He kept it because he missed Shane.

Shane must have zoned out again because when he opened his eyes, Ilya was lying next to him, propped against the headboard, and Shane was curled up on his right side against Ilya’s thick thighs with his head resting on his lap. The alpha was petting his head gently,

combing thick fingers through his hair.

Without a word, Ilya tilted his head back with a firm grip on the back of his neck and brought a bottle of water to Shane's lips. He drank like he was dying. He hadn't realized how thirsty he was until it was offered to him. When the water was gone, Ilya pushed a strawberry into his mouth unceremoniously.

Where did he even get strawberries? The only thing the alpha kept in his kitchen was protein-related items. He's pretty sure Ilya has never eaten a fruit in his life.

Ilya snorted, "My favorite fruit is apples."

Shane furrowed his eyebrows. "What are you even talking about?"

Ilya rolled his eyes before flicking Shane in the forehead fondly. Shane didn't really know what was going on right now, but he did know he liked it. Being the center of Ilya's attention was all he ever wanted. He couldn't stop the purr rumbling from his chest if he tried. Shane could feel the heat radiating from him again. He rolled his face until it was pressed into Ilya's stomach. "It's starting again," he whined. Ilya dropped his hand to rub over Shane's back comfortingly. "You're okay. I am here." Shane nodded. He probably should have researched more about the symptoms of long-term suppressant usage before he quit cold turkey. He felt like he was getting boiled alive from the inside.

Ilya carefully moved Shane from his curled position until he was straddling Ilya's waist and lying against his chest. It usually annoyed Shane when Ilya manhandled him, but before he could start fussing, he smelled Ilya's uninterrupted scent, the rich scent of pine and smoky amber made his mouth water. The alpha had taken off his scent patch. Shane immediately took advantage of the new position to shove his face against Ilya's neck and suck on his scent gland. The alpha hissed when he chomped down on it, but he didn't pull Shane away. Shane took this as permission to chew on him.

Ilya was the perfect man, the perfect alpha. He needed to make sure Ilya fucks him tonight when he is most fertile. Maybe his plan wasn't happening exactly how he had planned it, but he still got Ilya into his bed during his heat. Shane would take that as a win.

"Lya," he pawed at the alpha's chest with his right hand. Catching his attention. He grabbed his hand and brought it down to his stomach. The heat from his skin was soothing the ache. "Help." Shane looked

up at Ilya with watery eyes, and he knew he could relax now. The way the other man looked at him, like he was his most prized possession, made Shane shiver. He is safe, and Ilya will take control like he should, like he was meant to as Shane's alpha.

Ilya reached down and gently pulled Shane's hand away and curled it back up into his chest with his left arm. He was worried about straining Shane's shoulders, so it was better to have the smaller man restrained against his chest. "I have you."

That's all Shane needed to hear before he let the heat take him away. He smiled up at Ilya and lay his head back down.

—

Ilya had never shared a Heat with anyone before. He has had offers, obviously, but even the sheer idea of fucking someone who wasn't Shane made his skin crawl. He never talked to Shane about it directly, but he never slept with his acquaintances. He assumed Shane knew, but maybe he should have told him directly before this whole baby trapping situation happened with Carter.

It's not like it mattered anymore anyway. Sharing a heat with Shane would prove to be the last time he ever had to worry about Shane thinking he would fuck someone else. Or thinking Shane could leave him to fuck some useless alpha who didn't appreciate Shane the way he deserved.

Shane was his. Forever. Nobody else deserved him. Nobody else could give him what he wanted. Just the mere thought of another alpha touching Shane's beautiful skin made him bare his teeth over the little omega's head.

Shane would probably be scared if he knew how obsessed Ilya was with him. How he worshiped the ground he walked on. Well, it's not like it mattered anymore. After tonight, Shane would be stuck with him forever; there's no way he won't knock him up.

Ilya found it amusing how bad a liar his little котенок was, especially when it was over something as serious as stopping his suppressants. The heat melting his brain into mush probably didn't help, especially

when the concussion had already hindered his ability to think straight, but Ilya knew that even if they had that conversation before all of this happened, Shane would never be able to lie to Ilya's face. It would be embarrassing if it weren't so adorable. Plus, it made Ilya feel vindicated that his omega would never lie to him and be able to get away with it.

Ilya should know everything about Shane. That was his job.

Either way, it worked in his favor. Shane gave his consent to help him, which meant Ilya didn't have to feel any guilt about cumming in his soft hole until it took. And it will take. He will plug his omega with his seed until he knows for a fact they will make a baby. He won't give Shane the opportunity to get away. No other alpha can offer him what he can.

Ilya is healthy and virile. Really, the best condition he could be in to sire a child. And even if this first time didn't catch, well, Shane is staying with him for months. He has time.

Shane is a lot whinier during his heat than Ilya expected him to be. Usually, he was only a reasonable amount of whiny. It was cute at least. Watching Shane's pretty lips pout and purse out, demanding kisses, who is Ilya to deny such a sweet request?

Ilya was preemptive about this situation once learning about Shane's deception from the doctor. He had spent the last two days planning out how to make this a smooth and successful operation. He immediately went and bought groceries as soon as he could leave the hospital.

Precut fruit, protein bars, and stacks of water bottles lined Ilya's side of the bed. Everything was within easy reach; he would never have to leave Shane's side. Maybe dating Shane for all of these years had finally rubbed off on him.

Shane was also sticking to him like an octopus. Meaning his choice to stock essential items was excellent foresight. He had started grinding his hard cock against Ilya's abs for the better part of five minutes now. His broken arm was clutched to his chest protectively, and his good one was grabbing and squeezing Ilya's chest like his own personal stress toy.

Ilya relaxed back into the headboard. Watching Shane twitch and shiver against his chest as he pleasured himself. It was going to be difficult navigating this whole heat around Shane's sling. He won't be

able to put Shane on his stomach for fear of smashing his arm between him and the bed, and he can't risk injuring his collarbone further by putting him on his side. Lap sex or maybe missionary are his only real options. There were worse options.

“Does that feel good, baby?” He whispered lowly into Shane’s ear. The reaction is immediate; he whines high and breathy before coming against Ilya’s stomach in a weak little twitch. Ilya knows that wasn’t enough, by the way Shane starts grabbing at him again. Begging for more stimulation.

“Okay, okay, I will help.” Ilya huffs a laugh.

Ilyas's raspy voice sends a trail of heat up Shane’s spine, followed by his calloused hands. Ilya dragged his hand down Shane's back, letting his fingers bump over each vertebra until his fingers reached the deep back dimples over his hips.

The indents were Ilyas's second favorite feature on Shane, a close second to his freckles. His fingers played over the dents before dipping down to feel how wet Shane was. The poor boy was practically dripping with desire.

Shane stretched easily over Ilyas' thick finger, pushing in until it reached the first knuckle and curling. Shane gasped and shot his hand up to grab Ilya by the hair to ground himself. They had barely started, and already Shane was dizzy with need.

“More, need more,” he whispered into Ilya’s neck.

Ilya turned his face so he could kiss down the stretched expanse of Shane's throat, laving his tongue over the tense muscles and lapping up his scent. It was easy to slip another finger in. Crooking and twisting them until Shane was grinding back into his palm.

The heat inside was intoxicating. So wet and tight, sucking his fingers in greedily.

Ilya could feel his cock twitching in his briefs under Shane's ass. His weight forced friction against him until he had to grab Shane's hips to stop the wiggly omega from making him cum in his shorts like a high schooler.

Shane immediately fought back at the loss of fingers and friction. “No! Why did you stop?” he whined loudly, confused why Ilya was pushing him away.

“I'm not leaving. It's okay, принцесса. I’m still here.”

Shane did not believe him. The loss of heat made Shane grab at Ilya as he tried to move to take off his boxers, making it impossible to push them down. He growled and grabbed Shane's hand, pinning it to his back. “Stay still.”

The command in his voice forced Shane to go limp and blink up at him wetly. Stunned into submission.

Ilya huffed at his big, wet eyes. If their baby adopted Shane’s face, Ilya knew he was never going to win an argument in his life ever again. Shane just looked so sweet and pouty.

Ilya cradled him to his chest as he flipped their position, settling Shane against the pillows and sliding one under his hips. Shane did nothing to help, letting Ilya maneuver his limp body as he stared at the alpha. After Shane was settled and comfortably squished between all of his cushions, Ilya moved away to strip himself. Shane immediately made a displeased noise at the loss of contact, but he didn’t move until Ilya lay back over him. Pressing their bodies together and allowing Shane to lock his legs behind his back.

“Are you comfortable?” Ilya mumbled into Shane’s chest as he left open-mouthed kisses along his soft skin. Shane didn't really respond past a soft affirmative sound, but he didn't try to push Ilya away or try to rearrange himself, so Ilya figured he was just at that floaty place he went sometimes.

“I am going to fuck you now.” He said it like a statement, but he still waited for Shane to nod in response.

Ilya would usually spend more time stretching and opening Shane, but his heat made him so slick and loose that it was basically just a formality. He sat back on his heels, gently pushing Shane's knees up to his chest. The omega whined high in his throat from the stretch but didn't protest further.

“Shh,” Ilya hushed, “You are okay, baby.”

Sinking the head of his cock into Shane felt like heaven and hell all at once. The overwhelming heat and restrictive muscles immediately made Ilya twitch his hips forward on instinct. Shane gasped and immediately reached for Ilya. He carefully grabbed Shane's good hand and pressed it into the pillow next to his head. Leaning forward to kiss Shane and groan into his mouth as his hips inched deeper slowly. He

wasn't going to last. The enveloping heat sent a shudder through his whole body.

“Oh my god, Shane. You feel so good. So hot, принцесса.”

Shane had moved past the ability to make coherent words and just moaned loudly in Ilyas's ear. Ilya rested his forearms next to Shane's head as he sank into his hole fully. He was so tight it made Ilya’s vision blur. It was impossible not to roll his hips into a filthy slow grind as he bottomed out. The motion made Shane gasp as Ilya’s cock brushed the sweet spot inside.

He rolled his hips forward again, reveling in the loud moan Shane let out. His hole got tighter like a vise, holding Ilya inside like he was afraid he would leave. Shane wiggled his hand away from under Ilya’s and reached up to rake his sharp little claws across Ilya's neck, catching his scent gland by accident.

Ilya’s reaction was immediate. He couldn't have stopped even if he wanted to. The last thread of his control snapped. He felt like he was dying as he slammed his hips forward until Shane screamed from the impact. The sounds were obscene. Shane could feel Ilya in his throat.

Each thrust ended with Shane making punched-out moans. Everything felt like too much. Ilya’s body radiated heat above him, his thick cock stretching him so perfectly it made him want to cry. Shane couldn't do anything except hold onto his alpha as he bullied his cock into his hole like he owned it.

And he did, didn't he?

Shane grabbed at Ilya, forcing his face into his neck. “Gonna cum, alpha.” He moaned into his ear. Shane’s vision was already starting to blur, growing fuzzy, with black spots playing at the edge of his sight. Ilya snarled and sped up his hips, slamming into Shane's ass with renewed vigor. Ilya felt Shane tensing, his hiccuping breaths tickling the skin around his ear.

“Come, Shane.”

And that's all he needed. Permission.

Shane’s vision whited out as his back arched, forcing his hips back into Ilya and dragging his nails across his back. Shane's hole-tightening makes Ilya gasp. The tight tingling sensation flooded to the base of Ilyas's cock. He was going to knot Shane.

“Oh fuck, I am going to knot you,” he gasped out loud in disbelief.

Ilya had never knotted anyone before. He had never really felt the urge to do it before. But the pressure at the base of his cock was overwhelming and undeniable. The fierce squeeze of Shane’s body forced him to press deeper and shudder against Shane's neck.

It barely took a handful of seconds before Ilya’s knot fully developed and locked him inside Shane’s unbelievable heat. Ilya roared as his vision prickled with stars, making him come harder than he ever had in his life.

It wasn't intentional; Ilya would probably regret how it happened, how his first reaction to knotting for the first time was to clamp his teeth on Shane’s neck. He had no control over how his gums tingled with mating venom, as he locked them over the sensitive gland.

Shane screamed, thrashing against Ilya’s body, twitching, and trying to pull away from the pain. Ilya growled deeply in his throat, dropping his full body weight onto the smaller man, tightening his teeth, and shaking Shane slightly. He forced submission from the omega. The response was immediate. Shane went limp under Ilya’s dominating bite.

Ilya didn’t know what was happening. He just needed Shane to be still. He needed him to stop moving and just lie there. Let him protect. Let him bite.

He wasn't sure how long he lay there with his teeth and cock embedded in his omega. Slowly, he felt the black spots leave his vision and the gentle petting of Shane's hand in his hair. The nimble fingers untangle his curls slowly. It took Ilya a while to hear Shane whispering to him in a trembling, rough voice.

“It's okay. I love you.”

It wasn't until Ilya felt his knot deflate that he felt he was able to remove his teeth from Shane's swollen scent gland. Slowly, he unlocked his jaw and moved back off of Shane. Gently pulling out and laving his tongue over his mutilated neck to help the bite heal.

Ilya was terrified to look Shane in the eye. All he could do was stare at what he had done. They never discussed this. Ilya hadn't even known this was an option, that this could even happen without him purposefully trying for it.

“I'm sorry,” a sob tore out of his chest. “I am so sorry, Shane. I did not mean to do that.”

Ilya felt his chest tighten. His breath was coming in fast, shallow gasps. Ilya scrambled back off of Shane, kneeling between his spread thighs and grabbing his hair in shame.

Shane sat up underneath him and grabbed his face with his right hand, forcing Ilya to look in his eyes. “Hey, look at me. It is okay. You’re okay. I am okay.”

Ilya tried to believe that; he tried to let himself rationalize the situation, but his eyes flickered down and saw the blood slowly beading from the deep punctures of his fangs. His bite mark looked massive on the pale, delicate skin. It was already starting to bruise an ugly green color.

Shane must have seen how wild his eyes were getting. He was going to spiral. Shane could see it on his face.

Before Ilya could even move, Shane’s face grew dark and serious. He suddenly pushed up with more strength than he's shown in the past few days and knocked Ilya over onto his back. He expertly climbed on top of Ilya, slinging his thick thighs over Ilya's stomach, and slapped him across the face. Hard.

Ilya’s eyes widened as his head was forced to the side by the blow. The slap caused his cheek to heat up immediately and clear any other thought from his head except the sharp sting.

“You will not ruin this for me, Ilya Daniil Rozanov.” He snarled before he grabbed Ilya’s hair in a tight fist and kissed him with viciousness. “Do you hear me? You will not make me regret this bite. It is *mine*. Nobody else can have you. You’re *mine!”*

Ilya felt like he was in an alternate dimension. What was happening? Wasn’t Ilya doing all of this so Shane wouldn’t leave him? Before he could even ask what Shane was talking about, Shane snarled again, his eyes taking on a crazed look, and he pushed Ilya's head to the side and slammed his sharp little fangs down over Ilya's own scent gland.

The bond snapped into place like they were struck by lightning. Ilya jolted and spasmed. Clutching at Shane like a lifeline. Wrapping his whole body around his smaller body when Shane suddenly went limp, and his teeth slipped out of Ilya’s neck.

He must have passed out from the adrenaline spike.

Ilya couldn't think straight. All he could do was lie there with Shane gently gathered to his chest. Heaving breaths caught in his throat.

Holy shit. Shane just bit him.

Shane just finished a mating bond.

Shane was his. Forever.

Chapter End Notes

> принцесса: Princess
> моя любовь: My Love
> Котенок: Kitten
> солнышко: sunshine
>
> sorry if there is a missuse of past and present tenses in this. I do not care about the english language.

Chapter 4: The Surprise

Chapter Notes

> Sorry, it took me a bit to get this out; I was mostly just reading way too much fanfiction instead of finishing this. Some juicy stuff in this one; hope it makes up for the delay.
>
> Enjoy :)
>
> EDIT: I fixed the spacing on this chapter too.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Kissing Ilya was Shane's favorite pastime. His thick bottom lip slipped so firmly between Shane's more delicate ones. His mouth was rough and dominating, followed by soft little swipes of his tongue. Shane could kiss Ilya for the rest of his life.

Clawing his hands through the thick golden spun curls. Grabbing them like a lifeline as Ilya forced his way into Shane's body and soul. Carving a space in his entire being like he belonged there.

It was addictive. Shane had never been high in his life, but grinding down onto his alpha's cock while sucking on his tongue is as close as he thinks it could be to that feeling. It was euphoric.

Ilya growled into his mouth like a feral animal as Shane rotated his hips in a nasty circle. Ripping his mouth away from Shane's so he could grab at his chest, sucking Shane's sensitive nipple into his mouth. It made the smaller man shiver and writhe. The sensation was almost unbearable, like little explosions over the skin that Ilya grabbed and marked.

He loved how possessive the alpha was. Sucking love marks along every inch of skin he could reach. Squeezing his callous, rough hands over Shane's ass and thighs, pulling him as close as he could without climbing into his skin.

Shane was drunk on this feeling. The overwhelming sensation of being *craved.*

Needly little whines tumbled from Shane's mouth as Ilya gave up on their soft sex. Grabbing his hips and forcing him up and down his cock like he was a toy. Using Shane's hole for his own pleasure. His big

hands held handfuls of his ass as he forced deep, filthy grinds up into the omega.

Shane threw his head back. Squeezing his eyes shut as he let Ilya use him. “Yes, yes, Ilya.” He gasped out.

The sounds were obscene as the slick poured from his hole with every thrust, soaking the couch cushion underneath them. Shane would probably complain about it later, but now, all he can think about is how the ridges of his alpha's cock are rubbing against every nerve ending in the exact right way.

“Oh fuck, душа моя, I’m going to cum.” Shane cries.

The endearment makes Ilya snarl violently into Shane’s neck. Forcing his hips to move faster, slamming into him with finality as his knot forces past the tight circle of muscle. Shane screams as his vision whites out. Clutching close to Ilya as the alpha pumps him full of his seed.

Ilya clung to him, peppering kisses over his shoulders before grabbing his jaw to force kisses into every inch of skin on his face. Ilya’s love was so powerful and overwhelmingly beautiful. It made Shane shiver with joy. Knowing that all of it was for him.

Shane relaxed against Ilya to bask in the bliss. Enjoying the periodic twitch of Ilya’s cock inside him as he kept coming. Ilya was twitching uncontrollably, clutching Shane like a lifeline in his oversensitivity.

“I love you.” He kept whispering in Shane’s ear. Holding him like he was precious. “Thank you, I love you. Such a good boy. I love you.”

Shane just patted his head. Running a soothing hand down his neck to soothe the shivers that wracked his huge body. Basking in the affection. “I love you too, Ilya. My perfect alpha. My mate.” Ilya shuddered at the namesake. Reveling in the ownership, the permanence of it.

Shane was sore. The delicate skin on the inside of his thighs was chafed red from his alpha wedging himself between them.

“Lay me down, please,” he whispered to Ilya. Feeling all of the strength leave his body as he finally relaxes. Ilya grabs him, wrapping his thick arms around Shane’s upper back and holding his ass as he flips their position. Carefully laying Shane on the clean part of the couch and settling his heavier weight over him.

It's still an uncomfortable position with them still being locked together, but significantly better than sitting upright in the cold living room.

He can feel the heat leaving his body, sapping his energy. His fever broke that morning, and he had just been riding out the last few waves of his heat with Ilya. It helped to have the alpha close.

Shane was pretty sure a heat was supposed to last longer than three days, but looking up at the big alpha, he thought it was because Ilya was so desperate to knot him that his body just accepted its defeat.

The alpha was still grinding his hips into Shane's to abet the aftershocks. Clutching Shane to his chest like he was precious, Ilya was rubbing his stubbled chin all over Shane's neck, leaving red marks and skin irritation. Shane loved it. Just another mark from his alpha to revel in.

Despite the ferocity of his heat, Ilya cared for him with careful attention. Always making sure his left arm and shoulder were safe and secure in their sling. He made sure he was eating and drinking, feeding him by hand when Shane whined at being left alone to fend for himself.

Ilya was so so so careful with him. Shane knew he would be the same with their baby. Shane knew they would get a baby from this. Every time Ilya left to go clean up, Shane would roll back until his hips were elevated, letting Ilya's cum seep deeper into his body, forcing it into his womb.

It would have to be a miracle for him not to be knocked up at this point. But that brought up a whole new set of issues that Shane had to deal with, like talking to each other. Shane was dreading having any conversation about him lying about his suppressants. He was pretty sure Ilya knew he lied, but he never made a big deal about it. That bothered Shane.

"I'm hungry."

Ilya looked up from where he was hiding in Shane's shoulder to peer at his face. "Okay, what do you want?"

Shane surprised both of them when the first thing that came to his mind was waffles. Ilya moved back and stared at him. "Waffles. Like the crunchy breakfast cake?" Shane nodded. Ilya looked at him like he was an alien. "Last time I made waffles, you told me I was trying to

ruin your life."

"Well, that's because it was before a game. Now I am on leave. I want a waffle."

"If I make you waffles, you cannot yell at me if I use real butter instead of your gross one."

Shane rolled his eyes, which was still a bad choice from his concussion. Ilya noticed and tsked his tongue. Playfully glaring at the smaller man underneath him. "Do not be a brat, Shane. I will make you your waffles when my knot goes down."

Shane didn't dignify him with a response. He simply reached up with his good hand to fondle Ilya's pec. The muscle was dense but squishy, perfect for stress relief.

They stayed in that position, quietly touching each other until Shane felt the pressure release from Ilya's knot. A wave of cum rolled out of his hole as he pulled his cock the rest of the way out. It made Shane gasp, and Ilya looked entranced as he dragged his thick fingers through the mess before pushing it back inside. It was filthy, disgusting, and wonderful.

Ilya got up slowly, licking the mess on his fingers cockily as he got up to make Shane his waffles. The sight made Shane shiver. Ilya was so possessive.

Ilya was still partially sure the waffle request was a trick, but he still went to the kitchen to make Shane food like a good alpha. Ilya was an excellent chef. Everything he made was rich and flavorful. It made Shane wonder where he learned it from, but he worried the answer would be Ilya's mother, and the alpha hated talking about her. It made him sad.

Twenty minutes later, Shane was freshly showered and sitting at the bar with a plate stacked with waffles, scrambled eggs, bacon, and fresh-cut fruit. It was more than Shane asked for, but the aroma of the spread made his mouth water. Ilya sat down next to him, still naked, and watched him carefully as he loaded his own plate.

"You aren't going to shower?" Shane asked, mildly grossed out.

Ilya just rolled his big shoulders. "I will shower when I finish eating. You stole all of my energy." He looked over at Shane with dark eyes. It made him squeeze his thighs together.

They ate in silence for a while. The only sound was Shane's unconscious happy noises at having good food and the clack of their forks on porcelain. “So,” Ilya started casually, “can we talk about the suppressants?”

Shane's fork froze halfway to his mouth, a bite of egg slowly sliding off and plopping back onto his plate. Okay, so they were doing this now. Shane knew they would need to talk, but he had hoped that if he pretended it didn't happen long enough, Ilya would forget. No such luck.

Shane cleared his throat, putting his fork down. “What about them?”

“How about why you stopped taking them and then lied about it to my face? Yeah, let’s start there.” He didn’t sound angry; he just sounded confused and hurt, which was worse in Shane’s opinion.

Shane sighed and turned to look at Ilya. The alpha had already turned in his chair to stare at the side of Shane's face. Seeing the hurt splashed across the alpha's handsome features was worse than hearing it in his voice.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to lie about it.” Ilya raised an eyebrow at that. “Shane, you are terrible liar. Even worse when you lie about your lies.”

“Look, I am sorry I lied; I didn’t do it to hurt you. I just wanted something, and I didn’t think of how that decision would affect you before I did it.” Ilya’s face did a thing, drawing up tight and angry. “What is ‘something’ you were doing?”

Shane didn’t want to tell him the truth, not yet. He didn’t even know if he was pregnant. What if Ilya left him? Bite bonds can be broken. Ilya could go to a local clinic and get it reversed within 72 hours. Then all of this, all of Shane's plans, would be for nothing.

Maybe a half-truth then.

“I want to take a break from hockey.” The shocked silence was deafening. “I am sorry,” Ilya started, blinking rapidly. “I think I just hallucinated.”

Shane huffed a small laugh and pushed the big alpha teasingly. “It isn’t that weird, Ilya. I have been playing hockey since I was four. I haven't had a heat since I was sixteen. I don’t even know who I am outside of hockey, and it makes me feel like I am living inside of a

bubble.” Shane shrugged his shoulders, curling into himself a bit. Pushing his fruit around his plate with the fork.

Maybe this was more than a half-truth. More like a truth he never even really admitted to himself.

“I love hockey. I love my team and the adrenaline of a win, and pushing myself to be the best I can be. But,” he sighs, running a hand through his hair anxiously, “maybe there is more to life than hockey.”

Ilya nodded slowly, digesting what Shane said. “So, was the injury an excuse, too?” Shane looked up from his plate, startled. “What? No. I did not plan that. Marlow hitting me actually ruined a lot of my plans.” He mumbled the last part, but Ilya caught it.

“What plans? How long have you been planning this?” Ilya’s eyes were getting that desperate, feral look he got when something wasn’t going his way. Shane was confused. “Why are you so upset at this?” He asked.

Ilya stood up and started pacing back and forth in front of the stove. “I do not know how to say this in English without sounding like asshole, so I am just going to say it badly anyway.”

“Uh, okay?”

“Are you breaking up with me?”

Shane felt like he had just been punched in the chest. What the fuck?

“What the fuck are you talking about?” Shane exclaimed. Standing up too now.

Ilya threw his hands up in the air. “I do not understand you,” he huffs. “You act possessive of me because of Carter.” Shane bares his teeth at the name of the other omega. “But then you stop your suppressants so you can attract other alphas. Are you trying to leave me?”

Now Shane was confused too. “Why do you think my stopping my suppressants has anything to do with attracting another alpha?”

“You told me you would leave me if I got another omega pregnant. Carter said he was. I thought you were done with me.” Ilyas's voice hitches. Catching on to the last sentence like it was being ripped from his throat. “I thought,” he paused, “I thought I had lost you.”

Shane's world screeched to a halt. “Oh.” He understands now. Ilya thought that Shane stopped taking his suppressants because he wanted his scent to entice other alphas to him, so he could leave Ilya, because he had told Ilya if he played too hard and got someone pregnant, he would leave him for a better alpha. He had been joking, but Ilya took him seriously.

“If you thought I was trying to leave you, why did you spend my heat with me?” Shane asks delicately.

Ilya stopped pacing and looked up at the ceiling, talking to the ceiling fan instead of Shane. “Because I thought if I could get you pregnant, you would be forced to stay with me.”

And fuck Shane, because he had no idea what to say to *that*. Ilya was trying to baby-trap him. Ilya wanted him so badly that he was willing to risk their whole relationship by baby trapping Shane and forcing him to stay. No wonder he freaked out so badly when he accidentally bit Shane and mated him. That wasn’t part of his plan.

It took every shred of self-control for Shane not to grin like a lunatic. His sweet, dutiful alpha was just like him.

He needed to reevaluate his own plans now.

“Please say something,” Ilya begged. He was staring at Shane's blank expression now. The worry creasing between the alpha’s eyebrows.

“You were going to baby trap me.” He said flatly.

Ilya flinched as Shane hit him. There was a long, painful silence before, “Yes.” He whispered.

Shane sat back down on the stool. Staring at his big, broody mate. Honestly, this worked out better than Shane could have possibly expected. He felt like he was going to explode from excitement. Ilya *loved* him. Ilya was going to force him to stay.

Saner minds would have thought that horrifying. If any other alpha ever tried to do that to him, Shane wouldn’t have hesitated to disembowel them, but Ilya? His chosen life partner? His beautiful Ilya, who made him waffles while naked after knotting him within an inch of his life? Oh, this was a victory too sweet.

Shane let out a sigh, trying his best to sound disappointed.

“First of all,” he starts, “I did not stop my suppressants to attract another alpha; you are the only alpha I have ever and will ever want.” Ilya snapped his face up to look at Shane, a glimmer of hope in his hazel eyes.

“I stopped taking them because it was affecting my hormone levels. It isn’t healthy for omegas to suppress their heats for so long; it can affect fertility. I was already planning on stopping them for a few months to let my body stabilize.” It wasn’t the whole truth, but he wasn’t fully *lying*. It was bad for his body, and it could affect his fertility, but that's not why he stopped.

Ilya looked at him consideringly; many alphas in hockey did the same thing periodically. Stopping their suppressants so they wouldn’t risk their fertility dropping and ruining their chances of creating a legacy. This is an explanation that would make sense to the alpha.

“Secondly, I was going to ask you to share my heat with me regardless. Getting hurt just kind of derailed my plans on that.” The look of relief that washed over Ilya’s face almost made Shane giggle, almost.

“I always knew there was a possibility of me getting pregnant if we shared my heat together, but it was a risk I was willing to take.” Shane looked up from his fidgeting hands to look at his mate. “Having a baby with you, creating a family with you, Ilya, would be a great honor.”

Anything else Shane planned on saying was forgotten as soon as Ilya flew across the room and grabbed his face, kissing Shane like he was a lifeline. Grasping Shane to his chest with an overwhelming amount of need.

Ilya kissed him like a starved man. Crowding him into the kitchen island before picking him up like he weighed nothing. Shane laughed into Ilya’s mouth at his enthusiasm.

“Let’s go try to make a baby,” Ilya said happily as he carried Shane to the stairs. “What were we trying to do before?” Shane asked between giggles. Ilya just hiked him higher up on his waist. “I wasn’t trying hard before; now I have to put my whole heart into it.” And really, who was Shane to say no?

—

The first time Ilya noticed something was wrong with Shane was 3 weeks after sharing his heat. Shane had been normal, if a bit more emotionally sensitive than usual. Clinging to Ilya when they went to his follow-up appointments. Holding his hand like a vise when they were grocery shopping. Glaring at other omegas or women who looked at Ilya in public.

None of these were particularly off from the omega's normal behavior, but then he found Shane sitting in their pantry, crying at 3 am because he had eaten all of the Oreos. Well, that was new. Not just the rolling sobs but also the reason. Oreos. Shane hasn't eaten an Oreo in a decade. He bullied Ilya about his love for them by calling them "fat pills." Yet here he was. looking unbelievably small in Ilya's oversized sweatshirt and slouchy socks, clutching the empty Oreo box to his chest. The omega turned when he heard Ilya behind him. His eyes were big and full of giant tears rolling down his face.

"I should probably be worried." He thought absently as he scooped up his crying mess of a mate and took him back to bed. He added Oreos to his grocery list.

The second time Ilya noticed something was wrong was when Ilya came home from practice and found Shane curled up on their living room couch with a giant jar of peanut butter, scooping it out in large globs on the end of a sour pickle. While he watched House Hunters on TV. Shane usually hated that show, citing how horrible the realtors were and saying, "How can any of these people afford these houses, Ilya? What even is a butterfly therapist?"

Ilya wanted to be disgusted; he could never use that peanut butter ever again, but Shane just looked over at him with his sweet doe eyes and informed him that they were out of cottage cheese and chicken sausage. Which he had apparently also been eating together.

Ilya was positive something was wrong when, a week after Shane had gotten the clear to stop using his sling, he had curled up on his chest while they were watching a movie and started crying hysterically. Ilya was startled and immediately tried to soothe his shaking mess of an omega. He had thought Shane had hurt himself again. Somehow breaking his newly healed collarbone.

Ilya was even more confused when Shane started explaining why he

was crying. “Ilya,” he sobbed, “the turtle fell down the stairs.” He motioned to the screen, where Snow White was cleaning the dwarves' house with all of the cute forest creatures.

Maybe he should go buy a pregnancy test. He thought while comforting Shane. Showing him that the turtle was fine and all of the animals were safe in the kids' movie.

Ilya bought *several* pregnancy tests after he had been teasing Shane about how small he was when he had burst into tears. They had just finished fucking, and Ilya had noted absentmindedly that he could wrap one of his hands around both of Shane’s wrists. He had meant it to be sexy. Showing Shane how he can dominate him so easily, but the only reaction he got was Shane bursting into tears, declaring that he wasn't small, Ilya was just unreasonably giant. Shane had pulled away and flopped face down, heaving great cries into the couch cushions until Ilya had apologized and called him “normal-sized.”

The pregnancy tests were overwhelmingly positive. He made Shane take three different ones just to be sure. The little plastic tests sat in a neat row on their coffee table as Ilya held Shane.

Unsurprisingly, he cried and ate a weird snack.

Ilya would call him a crybaby, but he already knew what reaction that would get him, and he really didn’t want to have to apologize again. Ilya scheduled an appointment with Shane's doctor for the following week.

Four weeks after Shane’s heat, Ilya sat in the waiting room of the omega and women’s clinic while holding Shane’s hand. The omega was busy sorting through the pamphlets littering the tables between the chairs. Flipping through them with an increasingly mild green tint to his skin.

Shaw hadn’t had any morning sickness so far, but the stylized images of birth defects due to fetal alcohol syndrome were definitely going to make him vomit. Ilya snatched the pamphlet away and put it on the table as far away from Shane as possible.

He was about to complain about it when a nurse in a pale blue set of scrubs called their name. They followed her down the halls to a quiet room in the back. She gestured for Shane to sit up on the paper-coated bed and to a chair off to the side for Ilya. Shane never released his hand, so he just helped him up onto the bed and stood next to him like a loyal sentry.

The nurse didn't say anything, but the small smug smile she wore said enough.

The intake was easy. Basic questions about Shane's last heat and how he had been feeling. A set of simple vital tests, and the nurse was slipping from the room, promising a doctor would be with them soon.

"I think I'm gonna throw up." Shane groaned, lying back on the bed. "Well, there is trash can if you need it," Ilya said as he nudged the black trash can closer to the side of Shane's bed with his foot.

Shane just rolled his eyes.

They sat in comfortable silence for a while before Shane spoke again. "What if something is wrong with my baby?" That startled Ilya. "Why would something be wrong? You are healthy and strong. Baby should be, too."

Shane just shrugged. "The internet says I should have a lot more symptoms than I do. I don't have any nausea, and I don't have issues sleeping. And my pee is normal." He added as an afterthought.

Ilya just sighed internally. Of course, Shane consulted Dr. Google. "You are fine, Shane, but that is why we are here. To make sure, yes?"

"Yes." Shane nodded. Accepting the explanation.

Luckily, Shane didn't have enough time to spiral again before a sharp knock came to the door, and it swung open. A tall woman entered the room and smiled at them. "Hello, I'm Dr. Robbie. I will be your OBGYN today."

Shaw sat up to greet her and shook her hand with his casted one, never releasing Ilya's hand with his non-broken one. Ilya had to try extremely hard not to react to it. Dr. Robbie seemed to notice anyway and smiled at them sweetly. She plopped down onto her stool and rolled over to the computer, tapping loudly as she logged in and pulled up Shane's file.

"Alright, so what brings you in today, Shane?"

He shifted awkwardly on the bed before looking up at Ilya. Ilya just sighed and answered for him. "He took three different pregnancy tests. They were all positive. He has very weird food cravings. Lots of crying."

Shane shoved him for the last part.

Dr. Robbie just smiled calmly. “Alright, well you’re in the right place then! Your preliminary vitals look great, so let’s just run some blood work and have you pee in a cup. Sound good?”

Ilya nodded, and Shane agreed quietly. Looking slightly pale at the mention of blood work. Shortly later, the nurse came back into the room and handed Shane a little plastic cup, directing him to the bathroom down the hall. “Will you come with me, please?” He asked Ilya with big eyes. “I will stand outside the door, okay?” Shane nodded and dragged him down the hall.

Luckily, Shane was always hydrated. The boy always had his emotional support water bottle with him in case of an emergency. He came out of the bathroom a short time later and immediately latched back onto Ilya’s hand as they walked back to the room. The other nurses in the hallways giggled at them.

When they reached the room, the doctor had already left to process the urine sample, but the nurse was there setting up a blood draw kit. Shane squeezed his hand so tightly that Ilya could feel his knuckles pop.

“Okay, Shane, this will be pretty quick. I just need two vials, and then you will be done. I’ll give you some juice and a cookie after for your blood sugar.

Seeing the little packet of Oreos on the counter behind the nurse made Shane perk up a bit. The omega had become an Oreo fiend.

The nurse had Shane lie back on the bed and put his feet up. Probably so he wouldn’t pass out. She was quick and efficient as she prepped Shane’s arm and told him to take a deep breath. Shane gasped and squeezed Ilya’s hand when he felt the needle, but it was over quickly.

She cleaned up and handed Ilya the juice and cookies so he could open them for the omega. Noticing he still had a cast on his left wrist.

He cracked the juice and handed it over. Shane sipped it as he watched with rapt attention while Ilya unwrapped the Oreos. It reminded him of a cat. Stalking its prey. He held out the cookie to Shane’s mouth, and he obediently opened it, snatching the cookie from his fingers.

Yes, a feral little kitten indeed.

They only had to wait twenty or so minutes before the doctor came back in with a clipboard. “Alright! So great news. All of your labs are perfect. I can tell you really take care of yourself.” Shane preened at the compliment. “I expected that of a professional athlete, though,” she smiled at him.

“Your urine and blood tests both confirmed pregnancy as well. You have raised hCG in your blood, which means you're approximately four weeks along. This lines up with when you informed us of your last heat.”

Shane nodded and looked up at Ilya with sparkly wet eyes. Pressing a palm to his stomach carefully.

“I would like to see you back in three weeks for an external ultrasound. We will be able to detect the fetal heartbeat at that time and make sure it’s growing normally. Do you have any questions?”

Shane shook his head, too excited to come up with anything at the moment. Ilya is sure he will have a whole list of questions when they come back in three weeks.

“He isn’t getting morning sickness, is normal?” Ilya asked.

The doctor nodded, “Yes, that’s normal. Nobody's body presents the same, as all pregnancies are different. Some people never get cravings, and some never get nausea. It depends on a lot of different factors, but all of those reactions are normal, so I wouldn't worry about that.” That relieved Ilya. He had only ever heard of pregnancy causing nausea; he was happy to know his Shane was just a crybaby with weird cravings.

The appointment finished quickly after that. Basic care instructions were given, and his follow-up up scheduled, and they were off. Shane demanded they go get lunch. He needed a treat. Who was Ilya to deny his princess a treat?

___

Once Ilya knows that Shane is pregnant, he starts to notice the subtle changes in his scent, too. Where there was once only clean minty

freshness, there is now a more flowery, milky scent. Sweeter than anything he has smelled like before. It made his mouth water.

It was impossible to pay attention to anything the omega was saying to him when all he could smell was this new, delicious scent wafting gently from Shane's neck.

"Are you listening to me, Ilya?"

Ilya blinks and shakes his head slightly to clear the fog. "Uh," he says. Shane looks unimpressed.

"I asked if you have a preference for houses." Right, houses. Shane didn't like the idea of them moving around a lot once the baby was born, and Shane, the Mr. Real Estate he was, was determined to find them a "starter home."

"What is wrong with this house?" He asked. Shane looked at him like he was stupid. "Ilya, this house will be impossible to babyproof. You don't even have a real railing on your stairs!" He pointed to the glass banister over his floating staircase, and yeah, he had a point.

"Plus," he shrugged, "I want to be close to my parents. I want my baby to grow up with their grandparents around." Ilya understood that. He always wanted his children to have the supportive family he never got.

"I need to change teams."

Shane looked at him, surprised. Ilya looked at him calmly.

"My contract is up in 4 months. I will be a free agent so I can move anywhere, and I want to be in the same city as my family." He hugs Shane to his chest. Pulling the smaller man into his lap.

Shane's eyebrows grew together in thought. "Ottawa needs a new center forward."

Ilya made a face, and Shane laughed, "I know they are bad, but you are the second-best player in the league. You could make them better." Ilya hugged him and blew a raspberry loudly into his neck. "Oh, who is the first best player!?" And Shane screeches as Ilya starts to tickle him, too.

They were interrupted by the loud, shrill cry of Ilya's phone on the coffee table. He sighed and withdrew from Shane's reddened neck to

grab it. Simon's name flashed across the digital display.

"*Good timing, Simon,*" Ilya answered in Russian. Shane just turned away from him; he was much more invested in the houses on his laptop screen.

"*Ilya"—the* way Simon said his name made him sit up straight at attention. "*What happened?"*

Simon sighed, and it sounded like he ran his hand over his face before he continued. "*Carter Moses refuses to withdraw his pregnancy statement about you. He threatened to say you left him without any support and to bastardize his baby."* It felt like the ground just got ripped out from underneath him.

"Fuck."

Chapter End Notes

Shane knows some basic Russian and endearments that he learned specifically to tell Ilya and surprise him.

душа моя: My soul

Chapter 5: Consequences

Chapter Notes

> This chapter is more plot heavy to move the story forward. It's also longer than my other chapters, so I hope it holds up to everyone's expectations! This chapter has a lot of dialogue in it, so formatting that was kinda hard for me without putting it into a block of text, so I spread it out. if you dont like that, keep it to yourself <3
>
> I loved reading everyone's comments about Carter and what an evil worm he is, so this one is for you.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Carter was going to be a problem. A bigger problem than Ilya ever thought he could be. Maybe he underestimated the scheming omega, thinking him too absorbed in his own life to ever care about Ilyas. How wrong he was.

After his phone call with Simon, his agent emailed him all of the correspondence they shared. He was much more conniving than anyone gave him credit for. Everyone in the industry talked about Carter Moses like he was a sweet little pixie. Flitting from alpha to alpha to have a good time. Always rich, always successful, always unobtainable.

Ilya waited until Shane went to bed before texting Carter. A short, abrupt message that his agent would definitely tell him not to send.

We need to talk. In person.

The read receipt immediately informed Ilya that Carter got it. He stared at the three bouncing little dots until an address finally came through. They were to meet at a coffee shop just outside of town tomorrow after Ilya's practice.

Ilya very rarely felt fear. Stress, anger, and happiness were all emotions he was well acquainted with, but fear, that was something only his father and Shane could instill in him. And one of them is dead.

He tries to let it leave his mind as he goes upstairs. Climbing into Shane's nest and pulling the sleepy creature to his chest. Shane's body

ran warmer now that he was pregnant. The warm skin was making his scent so much softer and milkier. Ilya lay there for hours. Nose buried in the hair of his omega and dreading ever losing this security. This love. The family Shane was working so hard to give him.

___

The next day was a haze for Ilya. His anxiety was eating away at his focus and control while at practice. Nobody said anything to him, but he knew they noticed. Marlow and Summers frequently came to clap him on the shoulder or back. Keeping his head on straight even if it was short-lasting.

Carter met him outside of the cafe 15 minutes after the time he specified. Ilya would usually complain about his tardiness, but he knew the omega did it on purpose, knowing it would pull a reaction from him. Ilya simply looked down at Carter; the omega was dressed in a way that Ilya could only describe as adorable. Baggy brown jean overalls and a pink striped sweater. Ilaya's eyes narrowed. He dressed like this to make himself look like less of a threat than he was, to be manipulative. Ilya didn't give him a reaction before turning around and going inside.

He did not hold the door for him.

Carter seemed to find Ilya's avoidant behavior amusing. He smiled politely at him as they each bought a drink and sat at the farthest corner booth. Ilya hoped it offered some semblance of privacy.

He sipped his coffee, wincing at the bitterness. No wonder this place was deserted.

"I'm not here to fight," Carter said easily. "I just want us to be on the same page."

"There is no us," Ilya said flatly. Forcing his face to stay impassive, to not bare his teeth at the idea.

Carter smiled, all sharp teeth. "That's not how it looks."

He pulled an iPad out of his bag and tapped it a few times before

setting it on the table, facing Ilya. It felt like a trap, but Ilya looked anyway.

On the screen was a news article mockup; Ilya read the post twice, then a third time slower, like the words might rearrange themselves into something reasonable.

Left without support.
Abandoned during a vulnerable time.
Refused to acknowledge responsibility.

Of course, with a picture of Ilya overlapped with a picture of Carter holding a sonogram photograph. It made Ilya's blood run cold. Carter was right. If a picture was worth a thousand words, then this mockup was worth millions.

Carter was smart. He wasn't new to the media circus. Hell, Ilya wasn't even the first alpha Carter has plastered across the tabloids. He knew exactly how to word this to make Ilya look like the bad guy.

His jaw tightened, ticking from the strain, before evaluating his options. Carter never explicitly stated that the baby was his; he just cleverly implied it. People would assume. If working with Yuna has taught him anything, the implication is the biggest story. Half the work was already done for the audience at this point with the photo collage.

Ilya was dealing with a snake.

Ilya looked up at Carter darkly, rolling his shoulders and leaning back in his seat. Forcing his body to relax. Carter sat across from him, trying to look innocent as he sipped his $7 mocha monstrosity.

"I don't need you to confirm anything," Carter explained, talking with the tip of the straw still in his mouth. "You don't even have to say my name. But no comment? That's dangerous." He wiggled his stubby fingers in the air at Ilya, like he was chastising a child.

"For you," Ilya snapped.

"For you," Carter corrected. "You're the one with endorsements. A reputation. A… complicated private life." He smirked at Ilya like he knew all of his secrets. Ilya knew the Carter wasn't aware of Shane. That their only public encounters were purely professional, but the implication is that this little evil gremlin *might* know something. That's what this all boiled down to. Ilya didn't care what Carter would say

about him. But Shane? His mate and his baby?

Carter broke into his house. Carter was a threat.

No. Ilya cannot allow this to continue.

“I never said the baby was yours,” Carter went on, as if he was unaware of the turmoil he brewed in the alpha across from him. “But people assume. If you deny it too loudly, they will start asking why.”

Ilya thought of Shane. Of their secrecy. Of how fragile that silence really was.

“What if I prove it is not mine?”

Carter shrugged, indifferent to the threat. “By the time that happens, it won’t matter.” Ilya stared at the omega. One blow job in a grimy back alley, and this is where it landed him. Being blackmailed in the back of a shitty coffee shop.

“What do you want?”

Carter smiled at him like the Cheshire Cat; there was nothing kind or sweet about him anymore.

“Isn’t it obvious, Ilya? I want you to cooperate.”

Cooperation.

Ilya wished he had said money.

Ilya decided he shouldn't talk to this minx anymore. His English wasn't good enough to negotiate with someone as slimy and evil as Carter. He would need to tell Shane.

Without another word, Ilya stood up, grabbed his coffee, and left.

———

Shane was dozing on the couch when Ilya got home. It was later than usual, and Shane looked grumpy about having a late dinner. Ilya called for him and went to the kitchen to unload the boxes of Japanese takeout. Ilya knew that Udon was the only thing that would soften the blow of this conversation.

Shane excitedly plodded into the kitchen, slippers scraping along the floor as he shuffled to the island. He rummaged around a bit until he found the dumplings and noodles. It was fascinating to see Shane eating carbs. It is all he craved now: carbs, oils, and protein. It would be scary to watch if he didn't look like an overeager hamster when he ate. Stuffing his cheeks full like Ilya might take his food.

Ilya waited until he was halfway through his meal before clearing his throat.

“I need to tell you something, and you will be mad about it.”

The soft rumble of Shane’s happy purr petered out as he registered Ilya’s words. He shoved the shrimp he was holding into his mouth before putting his chopsticks down and sitting up straight, roaming his eyes over Ilya across the counter from him. Shane nodded for him to continue.

Ilya felt like pacing, like he was a trapped animal, but he knew Shane hated when he did that. He said it made it hard for him to concentrate on the conversation. Instead, he rested his palms against the island's marble countertop to ground himself. Pressing his skin to the cold stone until he could feel it in his bones.

“Carter isn’t backing down,” he said. “He knows the baby isn’t mine.”

Shane blinked slowly, like a cat.

“He doesn’t care,” Ilya continued; he could feel the anxiety crawling up his throat. “He says people don’t read corrections even if I prove the baby isn’t mine. They read headlines.” Ilya felt almost hysterical as he explained.

Shane’s face made no outward reaction, but the room turned oppressive from the flood of his pheromones. His sweet, milky, floral scent soured with rage.

“What does he want?” Shane looked down at his nail beds, picking at the cuticle as if he didn't really care. Ilya trod lightly.

“He said he wants cooperation.” Shane raised a single manicured eyebrow at that. He must have gone to get a facial today. Knowing Ilya was now ruining Shane's self-care day made him feel like shit.

“Did he threaten you?” Shane asked.

“Yes.”

Shane exhaled slowly. Picking up his chopsticks again and fishing around in one of the boxes for more shrimp. His calm demeanor made Ilya feel itchy. Nervous.

“Did you promise him anything?”

“No.”

“Good.”

That was it.

No reassurance. No questions. Just that single word. As he scavenged around in the boxes for treats. Ilya felt a chill run over his spine.

—

Ilya was terrified of his mate.

Shane wasn't necessarily a scary person. He was soft-spoken and funny. People called him the Golden Boy for a reason. People revolved around him like the sun. Ilya called him his sunshine because of how beautifully he lit up his world, but it was easy to forget how dangerous the sun could be when it was shining down on you so warm and gentle.

Ilya had a feeling that Carter was going to find out how destructive his sun really was.

Shane didn’t start doing anything immediately. After dinner he helped Ilya clean the kitchen. Puttering around like there wasn't a care in the world besides the stain on the counter from the soy sauce. Later, Ilya watched him while brushing his teeth as Shane put on a fuzzy panda headband while he washed his face and moisturized. Patting all of his many serums and creams into his skin with calm precision.

Ilya thinks back to when Shane started leaving his skincare at his house. That's when he knew Shane was serious about him. That should have been when Ilya stopped fucking around.

Ilya watched from the doorway as Shane rummaged through his closet, pulling out a soft, worn sweater and a pair of cute cotton panties. Shane never admitted it out loud, but he preferred omega-

specific panties over alpha-leaning boxers or briefs. Ilya preferred them too. They cupped him so sweetly.

Then, once Shane was comfortable, he dragged Ilya to their bed and curled up in his newly renovated nest (he washed everything, twice.) Bullying his way into Ilyas's lap and pressing his side snugly to Ilya's chest, legs flung over the alpha's longer ones.

He nudged Ilya until he turned on the TV and handed Shane the remote. Ilya rested his hand over Shane's stomach, warm and still flat, but slowly getting softer with his new diet and less rigorous exercise. It was silent as Shane browsed through the streaming platforms, never settling on anything long enough to really read the synopsis. He was still staring at the TV when he spoke.

"I don't like him," he said mildly. "He is sloppy."

Ilya didn't respond. Staring ahead blankly at the TV. Carter didn't feel sloppy to him. He felt terrified.

"That wasn't a very smart request." Shane says coolly.

Ilya turns to him. "What request?"

"Carter asked for your cooperation. If someone needs your cooperation," Shane continued quietly, "they need access to you. Time. Attention. Your silence." He sounded contemplative. Tapping his shiny manicured nail against the plastic of the remote.

"He assumed you were available to him," Shane said darkly, tightening his legs over Ilyas. Trapping them underneath his thick thighs. "He said it like he had a say in what happens to you."

Ilya opened his mouth, then closed it again. He was going to ask if Shane was jealous, if Shane had a say over what happened to him, but he decided against it. He would like to live long enough to meet his baby.

Shane reached for his phone.

"I don't *cooperate* with people who think they can touch what's mine," he hissed.

His. Ilya was Shane's. The claim felt so absolute, so possessive, so perfect.

Ilya watched in silence as Shane opened his notes app. He was confused until he saw the extensive running list of files. Law firms, independent consultants, publicists, magazine editors, and news station journalists. It dawned on Ilya as he opened a list labeled "Conflict Resolution" that maybe Shane was a lot more connected than he ever thought he could be.

These were all people who found Shane to be important. These people cultivated a network with him because they valued his opinion and other network connections. These people dealt in quiet favors and unspoken tokens of power.

"I'm not going to expose him," Shane said. "That would be messy. I'm just going to make him, hmm, inconvenient to work with." His thumbs moved like lightning over his email and between tabs. Pulling up news sites that posted the mockup that Ilya had seen from Carter. He is glad he told Shane before he saw it on the cover of a magazine. He did not want to have that kind of conversation again.

Shane had multiple tabs open; Ilya only saw snippets of the contents. *Morality clause*. *Reputational harm*. *Pending legal disputes.*

"We don't have to prove anything, Ilya," Shane murmured to his phone screen. "I'm just going to make him a liability to the people that matter."

The first email went to someone on his list in legal compliance. Shane framed it as concern.

"There's an unverified claim circulating involving one of your contracted talents. If it escalates, it could trigger morality clauses or insurance delays."

No accusation. No demand. Just the suggestion of a risk. A simple link attached that took them to the news rag Carter had paid to push.

The second email went to a producer Shane had met a few times at an annual charity gala.

"I heard casting is still flexible for this project. As your friend, I'd hate to see you lock in someone with potential legal baggage that could harm your project. I know how much your work means to you."

It included screenshots. The mock article. The sonogram image. The phrasing was highlighted with careful precision. He never said Carter's name explicitly, but everyone would know who he meant. Carter was an actor, and Ilya was a hockey player. They knew Ilya wasn't going

to be trying out for casting calls.

Shane and Ilya's well-known rivalry worked in their favor this time. Nobody would find it suspicious that Shane was reaching out to his friends about his renowned rival's scandal. It will come across as a genuine worry for their success, not in favor of Ilya or a plot to undermine Carter.

Shane was terrifying in his calm.

———

Shane never brought up Carter again after that night. He had left Ilya in their bed and talked with his mom on the phone for the better part of three hours after he sent off his last email. Ilya would have liked to know what they were talking about, but Shane always talked to his mom in Japanese when he didn't want Ilya or David to listen in on their conversations.

Shane was a bad liar, but he was a master manipulator. Ilya's father always told him that the best liars are the ones that tell you the truth. A liar is predictable; they will eventually get lost in the web, but a truthful manipulator doesn't need to lie; they just leave out the crucial details.

Carter was a liar. Shane was a truthful manipulator. It didn't take a genius to see where the cards would fall.

The following weeks found Shane creating mood boards and shopping lists for their baby. He still hadn't told his parents. He wanted to wait until his follow-up appointment so he could show them the sonogram. He wanted the proof of their love to show off.

Ilya was concerned about Carter showing back up in his life, but any time he brought this up, Shane just brushed him off. Saying there was no reason to worry about him anymore. That he "took care of it," which just made him sound like a yakuza from one of the dramas Yuna liked to watch.

But Ilya didn't have to keep asking about it. He watched it unfold on social media and through hurried text updates from Simon. The casting for the movies and shows Carter had auditioned for were now reopening casting calls. Carter went viral for getting in a screaming match in front of a film studio because he was kicked off of the set.

Carter posted about how nobody could commit to meetings or interviews anymore. How unprofessional everyone was.

Ilya showed it to Shane one day while he was sitting on the living room floor doing a puzzle. Shane just shrugged as he rearranged the pieces.

“You ruined his career.” Ilya didn't say it in an accusatory way, just as an observation.

“Hmm, no. He ruined his own career. I just let people know what kind of person they were getting into bed with.” Shane looked up at him, his eyes dark and cold. “Now you’ve learned your lesson about getting into other people’s beds too, haven’t you, Ilya?”

Ilya stumbled back a step. The ice in Shane's voice was sharp and painful. His eyes were boring a hole into his soul.

That hurt. Which, of course, is why Shane said it. “I have learned my lesson, моя любовь.”

Shane's eyes held his a while longer before returning to his puzzle. It sometimes hit Ilya that they were a species of predators. Ilya may be an alpha, but it was a well-known societal and biological fact that omegas were the deadlier gender. Seeing Shane look at him so calculatingly and coldly made him realize how much he underestimated his mate.

Ilya sank slowly to the floor a few feet away. Cautious of Shane’s temper. He snapped a lot faster and more viciously now than he had before pregnancy. It was probably instinct. Carter really could not have picked a worse time to cross them.

Shane was a fickle creature. He did not forgive and forget. He remembered, and he held grudges.

Ilya cleared his throat, tentatively asking, “Was all of this really necessary?”

Shane didn’t look up, but he did pause, holding a puzzle piece midair.

“Carter thought you were something he could use to negotiate with,” he said calmly. “I can’t allow that precedent to solidify in his mind.”

Ilya shifted uncomfortably. “That’s not what I asked.”

Shane turned, eyes softer than before but unyielding.

“I could have stopped after he backed off,” Shane admitted. “After I knew the threat was neutralized. After he realized what had happened.”

He looked into Ilya’s eyes. Cupping his stomach gently.

“But I didn’t want him to try again. I didn’t want him to think he could ever threaten you again. Threaten my *family*.”

He paused a beat before adding, “I don’t share. Not anymore.”

Ilya felt it then, not fear, not exactly, but the weight of being chosen by a creature as possessive as Shane. He didn't ask any more questions after that. He kissed Shane on the forehead, then the nose, and finally the lips. Breathing in his sleepy, warm, minty scent.

“You do not have to share me anymore, мое солнышко. You caught me with your teeth.” Ilya pulled his shirt collar to the side, showing the deep pink scar of Shane’s teeth on his neck. “And I caught you with mine.” Ilya gently ran a warm hand over Shane's own mating bite. Trailing his fingertips over the bumpy edges of the scar.

“I’ll never be anyone else’s.”

Shane's eyes were full of greed when Ilya caught them. Dripping with obsession and reverence. He moved from his cushion and crawled into Ilya's lap. Wrapping his arms around his thick shoulders to play with the soft hairs at the back of his neck.

“Mine.” He whispered before leaning in for a deep, biting kiss.

“Yours.”

Carter Moses disappeared quietly after that. There was no great publicized scandal. No overly syrupy sweet apology. Just the deletion of the mockup story, fewer auditions, fewer calls, and eventually, nothing at all.

Shane knew he had won.

—

The exam room was quiet, sterile, and too still. It smelled like antiseptic and lemon wipes.

Shane lay back against the paper-covered table, shirt pushed up, one hand gripping the edge while the technician adjusted the probe. Ilya stood close enough that Shane's knee rested between his thighs, and one of Ilya's hands splayed warm and solid over Shane's ribs.

"You're right on track for eight weeks," the technician said, smiling at the screen. "Everything looks good."

Shane's breath caught.

"Okay," she continued, turning up the volume. "You might hear it now; it can be pretty staticy, so listen for the repetitive beats."

The sound filled the room instantly. The ultrasound tech was right; it did sound like radio static, but underneath that was a repetitive thump.

Fast. Relentless. Alive.

Shane choked on a breath and reached blindly for Ilya, fingers twisting into the fabric of his sleeve. Ilya didn't hesitate; he leaned forward excitedly to press his forehead to Shane's temple, his free hand flattening over Shane's chest, as close as he could get to the baby without touching the gel smeared across Shane's skin.

"Oh," Shane whispered, voice breaking. "Oh, Ilya." He hiccuped.

"That's a strong heartbeat," the technician said softly. "Very strong."

Tears slid down Shane's temples into his hair. He didn't wipe them away. He couldn't look away from the grainy little screen.

"If you look right here," the tech said while pointing to the screen, "you can see the fetus. It's about the size of a kidney bean right now."

Ilya leaned forward to see the screen better. It mostly looked like a dark blob with TV static, but he could see a curled little bean shape in the blob.

Ilya moved back excitedly and kissed Shane's hair, reverent and unguarded. "Our baby. It's little bear, моя любовь," he murmured, like a promise meant only for them.

After the tech had wiped the clear gel off of Shane, he sat up on the

bed wrapped in his hoodie while Dr. Robbie scrolled through his chart.

“Everything looks excellent,” she said. “No complications. If you wanted to, you could return to play with monitoring.”

Shane laughed quietly, incredulous. “No.”

She looked up. “No?”

“Hockey is a violent contact sport,” Shane said, waving around his wrist that was still held in a blue cast as proof. “And I’m pregnant.”

The doctor smiled. “Then that’s the right call.” Ilya gripped his hand, elated.

—

Shane set up a meeting two days after his ultrasound. He needed to make his statement to the Metros. He would be lying if he said he wasn’t terrified at their reaction. It helped that Ilya took leave to fly to Montreal with him. Shane didn’t think he could handle this alone.

The meeting room was smaller than Shane expected. No players. No assistants. Just management. The head coach, the GM, and legal counsel. People who knew how to keep their mouths shut or make things disappear.

Ilya positioned himself immediately at Shane's back like a guard dog. He stood just off to the side of the wall of windows, arms crossed, presence unmistakable. He didn’t sit. He never sat when he wanted control of a room.

The GM cleared his throat. “You said this was urgent.”

“It is,” Shane said evenly. He hid his shaking hands under the table. He felt Ilya shift behind him. Restless.

“I’m eight weeks pregnant,” Shane continued. Trying to keep his voice even, “I’m also mated. I’ll be taking maternity leave effective immediately.”

The immediate deafening silence made shane's chest tighten.

The legal counsel glanced down at their tablets. The coach blinked slowly. The GM's gaze flicked, just once, to Ilya, then back to Shane.

"With whom?" the GM asked carefully. Shane didn't answer right away. Feeling the words catch in his throat.

Ilya answered for him.

"With me." He said it like it was a dumb question to ask. Why else would Ilya be here having this conversation?

The words cut clean through the room. Heads snapped towards the looming alpha.

"Ilya Rozanov," he said, his accented voice calm and unmistakable. Gesturing to himself sarcastically, "Alpha. Boston Raiders center forward." He didn't elaborate further. Letting the silence hang in the air uncomfortably. These people knew very well who he was.

"This relationship is private," Ilya continued. "The pregnancy is private. You will not confirm, deny, or speculate."

The GM frowned. "You don't play for this organization."

"I don't need to," Ilya said flatly. "We're mated. This affects my career as much as his. This is *our* life."

Shane spoke then. "I'm not asking for permission; I am formally informing you. It is in my contract that I can request medical and maternity leave whenever necessary without complication as long as I have medical records to validate my absence."

Ilya came forward then and dropped a manila folder on the table; one of the legal representatives took it. Inside was documentation from Shane's OB/GYN and the sonogram copy. They passed the picture around to the other managers.

The coach leaned back slowly. "This is… unprecedented."

"It is manageable," Ilya said. "If you manage it. Hollander is hardly first omega to get pregnant in competitive sports."

A manager in marketing spoke. "You're asking us to keep this contained until—"

"Until the pregnancy is viable," Shane said. "Until it's safer," he whispers the next part, "until we know I won't lose it on accident."

The head of legal was a woman, and the assistant manager was an omega. They both looked at Shane with soft eyes. Understanding his fear.

Ilya cleared his throat once. “Leaks can be traced. Consequences follow.” The threat wasn’t loud. It didn’t need to be. Ilya stared at the GM with sharp eyes.

The GM exhaled. “You understand the optics.”

Ilya’s mouth curved faintly into his signature cocky smirk, a sharp canine glinting in the fluorescent light. “Better than most.”

Another pause. Management glancing at one another before silently coming to a conclusion.

Then the coach nodded at the pair. “Okay. We’ll structure leave. Security protocols. Media silence.”

Shane felt the tension finally ease from his shoulders. It was not relief, not exactly. Mostly, it just finally granted him permission to breathe.

When the meeting ended, Ilya waited until the door shut behind them before stepping in close. Crowding Shane into the hallway wall. His hand hovered at Shane’s elbow, not touching, not wanting to push too far if he was overstimulated.

“That was good,” Ilya murmured.

Shane huffed a quiet laugh. “You were terrifying and cocky.”

Ilya’s eyes softened, just for him. “That is whole point.”

Shane tilted his head slightly, a private smile ghosting his mouth. “We’re having a baby.”

Ilya’s control fractured for half a second. He grinned with all of his teeth barred and pressed a kiss to Shane’s forehead, slightly too hard and excited “We’re having a baby!”

Chapter End Notes

Everyone's comments about Carter turkey-basting himself with Ilya's used condom had me in tears. i wish I thought of that before I wrote this lmao

Comment if you think Shane should have been meaner. My sister

said I should have made them fistfight in a walmart parking lot

Chapter 6: Healing

Chapter Notes

> I wrote this chapter while in work meetings over the past 3 days. Whoever said adults shouldn't be in fandom has never known the thrill you get from writing gay porn across the table from your boss.
>
> Anywhoooo
>
> I am almost done with the next chapter, which will have minor time skips for pregnancy's sake. I need round, glowy, pregnant Shane like a drug. It will probably be posted Wednesday-ish.
>
> Enjoy the Hollander family vibes in this one! I love writing Shane's parents. They are my favorite.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Shane’s cast came off on a Tuesday.

The doctor was methodical as the buzz saw cut through the hardened shell like butter. It wasn’t Shane’s first cast, but it made him anxious every time the saw came close to his skin. Carefully, she peeled the cast off of Shane's wrist, letting the cold air of the room envelop his arm. It ached slightly, but the relief from the itchy cast was amazing.

“Alright,” the doctor said. “Let’s do some stress testing.” She moved carefully, rotating his wrist to test his reflexes and having him press his hand against hers to assess the strength. She seemed pleased with the results.

“Your wrist looks great; it healed perfectly. I want to check your concussion now.”

Shane stared straight ahead as she shone a penlight over his eyes, checking his pupil dilation. She made a happy noise and went to notate his file on the computer. “Do you have any lingering headaches or light sensitivity?”

“No. My head will hurt if I am in the sun too long, but it’s okay if I put on dark sunglasses.”

She nods and notates that as well. “Okay, that’s within normal levels

of sensitivity. Just call us if it gets worse."

Shane nodded and leaned back into Ilya's broad hand across his back.

"Well, Mr. Hollander, you're cleared. You don't have any restrictions beyond common sense," she joked.

They thanked her and walked into the hallway as she finished her notes.

Shane flexed his hand. Rotating his wrist for the first time in months. "I can move finally," he laughed. Ilya just smiled and kissed his forehead. Taking his hand and went out to the receptionist.

—

A week after Shane got his cast off, and Ilya had requested leave from his team for 2 weeks, they scheduled a lunch with Shane's parents.

The restaurant was nice. Not flashy. The kind of place Yuna liked because it was quiet enough to talk, and David liked it because the portions were generous. Shane had been nervous all morning in that fluttery, hopeful way that lived somewhere between joy and terror.

His parents stood the moment they saw them enter the door.

"My boys!" David said, pulling Shane into a hug that smelled like expensive cologne and familiarity. "No cast this time. I like this trend."

Shane laughed into his father's shoulder, "Ilya is making me do physical therapy, so it still hurts."

They pulled apart, and David went to hug Ilya as Yuna stood to hug Shane.

"Well, he did promise the doctor he would make you do it," Yuna said fondly. Patting Shane on the cheek as she hugged Ilya. It was funny watching him lean down to hug his mom. Ilya was unreasonably large.

They sat down, and Yuna immediately said, "You look tired."

"I feel okay," Shane said. "I promise. Ilya took good care of me. It was probably just the flight."

The waiter came by shortly after and took their drink orders, letting

them browse the menus as they made small talk. Shane looked over the menu, and all of the entrees he would have usually ordered made him feel a brief wave of nausea. His baby did *not* approve of macrobiotic diets.

Shane sipped his water as Ilya talked with his parents. They were asking him about the upcoming games he would have. His team has a set of 4 games happening back-to-back next month to qualify for the cup. Shane was *not* looking forward to missing his alpha for ten days.

The waiter came back to take their orders, and Shane tried to avoid his parents' eyes as he ordered the three-cheese jalapeno mac and cheese with breaded chicken. Ilya didn't blink, used to his out-of-character food orders by now, but he could feel his parents staring into the side of his face like lasers.

His dad cleared his throat. "So, are you not lactose intolerant anymore?"

He just shrugged and took a deep breath. He looked up at his parents and grabbed Ilyas's hand under the table. Ilya looked over at him with a questioning quirk to his eyebrow, and Shane just nodded. His throat was too tight with nerves to get any words out.

Ilya leaned down to where Shane had put his bag between their chairs, rummaging around until he found a thin envelope. It felt heavier than it should have as he placed it on the table and slid it across towards Shane's parents.

Yuna leaned forward to pull it closer. She looked up at them as she slid a manicured finger under the edge to flip it open. She carefully pulled out a card that had a little stuffed bear on it; flipping it open, the small glossy sonogram photograph fell into her palm.

For a moment, no one breathed.

Then Yuna's face crumpled. Her hand flew to her mouth, tears spilling down her cheeks without sound.

"Oh," she whispered. "Oh, sweetheart."

David leaned in, eyes glassy, voice rough. "Is that… real?"

Shane nodded. Once, nobody said anything else as his parents studied the grainy blob in the photo. "It looks just like you," David said to Ilya, and it made Shane burst into laughter. He didn't realize he was

crying too until Ilya pulled him into his side to rub his face on the alpha's nice shirt.

Yuna stood and wrapped Shane in her arms, holding him tightly, protectively. Shane melted into her, breath hitching. He hadn't realized how much he needed this, to be held by his mom without questions, without expectations. Just unconditional love.

"We're so happy," she murmured. "So happy for you."

She hugged Ilya as David scooped Shane up into his arms. His father wasn't as big as Ilya was, but his comforting scent of pine trees and spearmint made him melt into his embrace. "My baby is having a baby." He whispered into Shane's hair, kissing his head with tear-wet lips.

Yuna hugged Ilya and shared a soft, knowing smile with him, proud that he had confided in her that they were trying for a baby when Shane was injured. "Thank you for loving my baby." Ilya choked on a sob and buried his face in her delicate neck. She patted his broad back as he collected himself.

"Of course, Yuna. I'll always love him."

They all pulled away and saw their waiter standing next to them awkwardly with their food. They quickly all sat back down in their seats and apologized for making a scene. "Don't apologize, sir. Congratulations on your new family member." He said sweetly. Shane felt tears welling up again, and the waiter looked around, startled. Ilya just chuckled and made a placating hand gesture. "Is okay; he is just crybaby right now." Shane smacked him on the shoulder, but the waiter seemed relieved he wasn't going to get yelled at.

They ate in silence for a while before Ilya cleared his throat. "We have another announcement."

Everyone looked up from their plates as Ilya took Shane's hand on the table. "We are mated."

Yuna blinked. Then nodded slowly, as something had finally aligned. "Okay," she said. "That makes sense."

Shane exhaled shakily. He had been worried about their reaction to the mating more than the pregnancy for some reason.

A few minutes passed. Hands wiped at eyes.

Then Ilya spoke again. “We want to get married. Before baby is born.”

“Okay,” she said. “Good.” David nodded along with his wife. “That is the best option.” He agreed.

“You are taking this weirdly well,” Shane said. Yuna looked at him blankly. “Shane, honey, I have been planning your wedding since you were 12.”

Shane should have expected that. He got his OCD from his mom.

David nodded as he cut into his chicken. “She has files. Venues, schedules, DJs. We can mail them to you.”

Ilya stared. “You… planned this?” He had never experienced this level of advanced planning before. (Though Shane did make him set up a five-year plan once they found out he was pregnant.) He should have expected this from the woman who made Shane.

“For years,” David said with a grin. “She loves aggressively.”

The rest of lunch was uneventful. His mom teased him a bit about his food choices, and Ilya jumped at the opportunity to tell her all about Shane's weird food cravings. David joined in and shared some of Yuna’s. “She would eat smoked oysters straight from the can like a goblin.” Yuna just rolled her eyes. “They are good sources of protein and fatty acids.”

David shrugged, “Sure, but I don’t think you can defend putting whipped cream in pickled pepperoncini.” Yuna responded promptly, “David, I can defend anything.”

David just patted her hand before shaking his head at Ilya, making the younger alpha laugh. Fighting with Yuna and Shane was a losing battle. Both of them were too stubborn to ever do something as simple as *lose*.

Ilya waited until Shane was halfway through his sizzling cookie before he brought up hockey.

“I’m transferring to Ottawa.” He said it without any preamble, and it made Shane choke on a chocolate chip.

Yuna stiffened instinctively. “Leaving Boston?”

“So I can be here,” Ilya said. “With Shane. With baby.”

Shane's throat tightened. He hadn't expected how much that would mean when said out loud. It sounded so much more real.

Yuna hesitated. "What about your loyalty to Boston? Boston's invested in you. In your career."

"He is being loyal," Shane said, interrupting her hockey mom thoughts, tears spilling over his cheeks despite himself. "He's choosing me."

Yuna crossed the space instantly and pulled him into her arms. "I'm sorry, sweetheart. You're right. You're right, he should be here to take care of you and your new little family."

She looked at Ilya, eyes bright and fierce. "Thank you for choosing my son."

Ilya nodded, voice rough. "Always. I will always choose Shane."

David smiled gently, clapping his hands in a way only dads did to break the tension. "And once you're married, we'll sort your Canadian passport."

Yuna wiped her cheeks and nodded. "Already planning that."

Ilya blinked. "I don't even know how—"

"You married into the right family," David interrupted him, winking.

Shane laughed as he wiped his tears and leaned into Ilya's side once his mother returned to her chair. He felt overwhelmed in the best way. Nothing had been demanded of him. His joy had been treated carefully, like something precious, sacred.

For the first time since everything began, Shane felt held by the future instead of chased by it.

—

Ilya's contract with Boston did not end quietly.

It ended with a countdown clock on every major sports network. Every phone, every screen, every notification screamed his name. *Rozanov to Ottawa? Boston loses its second star. Is this even legal?* Analysts dissected every number, every angle. Fans speculated. Boston

media mourned. Ottawa media cheered. Headlines were relentless. Social media was ablaze.

Rozanov's camp remains silent.

League sources say Ottawa is a long shot.

Is Boston about to lose its franchise alpha?

And then, poisonous threads through it all, quieter but persistent:

Industry insiders note Rozanov has declined all comment amid recent off-ice controversy with actor Carter Moses.

Sources close to the situation describe "unusual timing."

Ilya didn't comment. He ignored it all. Pretended he didn't see the notifications piling up, the calls from agents, the subtle pressure from sponsors, or even the requests for statements he had no intention of giving. He packed his life into boxes instead, but even that felt like drowning.

He couldn't stop thinking about Shane.

He finished the season. Shook hands. Played like nothing was wrong. When reporters shouted questions about his future, about Ottawa, about loyalty, and about rumors he refused to dignify, he smiled thinly and said nothing at all. It was unlike his normal cocky bravado, and it made everyone worried.

It was unlike him.

The league noticed.

So did the press.

They noticed how quiet he'd become. How he didn't bite back. How he didn't laugh it off or dominate the narrative the way he always had. They noticed that one name, once everywhere, had quietly vanished from entertainment headlines entirely. No premieres. No casting announcements. No statements. Just absence.

And they noticed the timing.

The announcement hit at noon.

Ottawa acquired Ilya Rozanov in a deal that sent shockwaves

through the league.

Phones melted. Jerseys sold out in under an hour. Boston burned.

Speculation crystallized into certainty almost instantly. The narrative wrote itself, ugly and convenient.

Power recognizes power.

Cross Rozanov and disappear.

No one said it outright. No one had to.

Shane watched it all unfold from the comfort of his nest, feet tucked beneath him, hand resting over his stomach. He didn't feel as guilty about Ilya leaving Boston as he thought he would. He felt chosen. Ilya had been their captain; he led them to victory time and time again. He had given them everything. Shane understood this. But Ilya was his before he was theirs, and whether the world understood it or not, Shane needed him more than anyone else ever had.

Ilya came home late that night; exhaustion clung to him like sweat after a brutal game. The kind that sank into his bones and refused to leave.

"It's done," he said simply.

Shane stood and went to him without hesitation, wrapping his arms around Ilya's waist. The alpha folded into his hold. Collapsing into the touch harder than expected, like he'd been bracing himself all day and his strings had finally been cut.

Outside, the world was already rewriting the story.

"Does it bother you?" Shane asked that night. curled against him in bed, staring up at the ceiling.

"Does what bother me?"

Shane wiggled closer, resting his chin on Ilya's chest. "That the way I got rid of Carter is being pushed onto you. Especially the timing. It's not ideal with you moving to Ottawa."

Ilya made a quiet rumbling sound like he was choosing his words carefully. English was always harder for him after a long day.

"Нет ху́да без добра́."

Shane sat up. He knew this one. “Every cloud has a silver lining?”

Ilya nodded.

“I am not happy that Carter did this, but I will always take the blame for his downfall if it keeps you safe. You are my положительная сторона.”

Shane’s throat tightened, tears stinging his eyes at the sweet devotion in his voice. Ilya pulled him close, curling around him and cocooning them into Shane's meticulous nest.

Ilya didn’t correct the public.

He didn't need to.

All would become clear in time.

He packed instead of thinking about it. Boxes everywhere. Clothes, equipment, and trophies he didn’t care to look at anymore. The sound of tape tearing felt louder than any crowd cheer.

They bought the house Shane picked out together, not a condo, not something temporary, but a real house. Quiet street. Mature trees. Fifteen minutes from Shane’s parents. Close enough that Sunday dinners were inevitable, far enough that Shane could still breathe.

It was there in that empty house they had bought near Shane’s parents that Ilya collapsed onto the floor. Boxes were still stacked haphazardly around him. He pressed his palms to his face, letting the weight of it all hit.

Shane sat on the couch that the movers had delivered that morning, half-asleep, reading something on his phone, oblivious to the storm brewing inside of his alpha. Ilya watched him for a moment and felt the weight settle, the responsibility, the fear, and the inevitability.

He had controlled everything in his life. Everything. Every game, every contract, every headline he could manipulate with a look. But now… he had to move to a new city. Face a new team. Face scrutiny he could not ignore. And on top of that… Shane carried his child. He had *always* been the alpha. Always the one people followed. The one the world reacted to.

What if something goes wrong?

Shane's hand on his shoulder startled him out of the spiral. "Hey," Shane said softly, sensing the inner turmoil, "you're overthinking."

Ilya shook his head, taking a steadying breath. "I'm… preparing," he admitted, voice tight. "I have to be ready. For the baby, for us. For… everything."

Shane tilted his head, concern soft in his eyes. "You already are. You've got us."

Ilya exhaled, a mix of relief and lingering panic. He wanted to believe it. He wanted to control everything, but this time, he couldn't. Not completely. All he could do was plan, protect, and hold Shane close. Hold his whole little family in his arms.

The boxes remained half-packed. The world outside roared. And Ilya, the unstoppable alpha, let himself feel the weight of the life he had chosen, fragile, real, and terrifyingly beautiful.

He sat up and looked up at Shane. His hair was disheveled from running his hands through it all day in stress. He was the most beautiful creature he had ever seen.

"Hey," Ilya said suddenly.

Shane raised an eyebrow. "Hey?"

"You wanna fuck on the new couch?"

Shane burst into laughter and nodded, pulling Ilya up off the floor to bracket him in. He kissed Ilya like he needed it to breathe. Pulling back slightly, running his hands over the alpha's face gently. "I know this is scary. But I am so proud of you, моя любовь."

The tears were spilling over his eyelids before he realized he even wanted to cry. Shane just shushed him and pulled Ilya down on top of him. "You're allowed to cry, you big oaf."

Ilya muttered something that sounded like "what is an oaf?" but it was lost in the soft curve of Shane's shoulder before kissing the delicate skin.

They hadn't had much time to be intimate over the past week due to all of the moving and planning. Shane missed his alpha, and Ilya was

getting anxious about the lack of touching. Looking over Ilya's wide shoulders as he pressed him into their new leather couch was a sight to behold. The sun was just starting to set, casting golden rays across Ilya's freckled skin. He looked like a god.

Shane runs his fingers through his alpha's hair slowly. "I hope our baby gets your curls."

Ilya propped himself up on his forearms, looming over Shane. "I hope it gets your freckles. I am weak to them." Shane rolls his eyes. "I hope they don't. I hate my freckles." Ilya gasped loudly at the blasphemy.

"Take that back!"

Shane just laughs at the horrified expression on his mate's face. "Make me." He teases, and Ilya takes that personally.

Ilya growls low in his throat, making Shane squeal as his big hand grabs Shane's neck. Pulling him close and biting into his mouth. It's wet, and painful, and *wonderful.* God, Shane loves this. Knowing how feral he can make his alpha with a few teasing words.

Ilya leans up on his knees to yank his shirt over his head, and Shane's hands immediately go for his pants. Stretching the elastic waistband of his sweats down under his heavy balls. Pushing the package up proudly for Shane's viewing pleasure. He reaches down and wraps his hand around Ilyas's cock in reverence.

It looks so big in his hand compared to Ilya's own. Ilya groans loudly, echoing in their empty living room, before reaching for Shane's pants. He yanks them down, folding Shane up until he can rip the sweats off and throw them over his shoulder.

"Fuck, you're so wet."

Shane whines as Ilya runs a thick digit over his hole, pressing in with very little resistance. He didn't expect pregnancy to make him so unbelievably horny, but he can't help but want to fuck constantly. His face grew red as he admitted to his dirty secret.

"I fingered myself in the bathroom while you were organizing the furniture."

Ilya stared at him with a surprised sparkle in his eye. Shane rarely played with himself. Why would he when his alpha was right there and so willing to do it for him? Ilya's cock twitched in Shane's hand at

the admission, and it made his cheeks burn even hotter.

“This means I can fuck you then, yes?”

Shane nodded and immediately started pulling Ilya's hard shaft to his hole. He barely touched it to the pink bud before Ilya was rolling his hips forward to settle inside. They both moan in sync. The heat inside Shane was intense, his hole dripping slick in obscene amounts.

Shane scrambled for purchase as Ilya braced his knees to thrust up into him harder. He grasped at Ilya’s shoulder, raking his nails over the smooth skin as Ilya’s hips pushed him up the smooth leather.

“Oh fuck, Ilya.”

The sound of skin slapping was embarrassingly loud in the lofty room, but all Shane could think about was how good it felt to have Ilya so deep inside of him. Thick veins dragging across his walls and sending sparks of pleasure through his body.

Ilya leaned down to kiss him. Licking the sounds off of his tongue as his hips snapped into Shane’s. His eyes were dark and glassy. Staring at Shane like he was salvation. Eyes hooded but open despite their desperate kissing. He didn't want to miss a single moment of Shane’s beautiful reactions.

The alpha reveled in the punched-out little sounds he made when a thrust was particularly hard and the high-pitched whines when Ilya rolled his hips into a filthy circle as he pressed in, bullying Shane’s prostate with every roll.

Ilya noticed when Shane started breathing harder, wailing louder. He knew the omega wouldn't last much longer. He pulled back and sat on his heels, yanking Shane down onto his cock in a rough pull on his rounded hips. He screamed at the sudden change in position but let Ilya fuck him how he wanted.

Shane was starting to gain baby weight. His once sharp, toned body was filling out. Becoming round and supple. It made Ilya feel crazy. He wanted to bite. “You are so beautiful.” Ilya gasped between thrusts. Hypnotized by the rebound of Shane's ass as their hips met violently.

“Fuck, Ilya! I’m gonna cum.” He was crying now. Big fat tears were running down his temples as the omega clawed at Ilya's chest and arms. Anything he could reach to ground himself to the alpha.

“God, Hollander. I am going to fuck another baby into you.”

Ilya’s hips sped up again, a ridiculous pace that he knew he couldn't maintain, but he didn't need to. Shane screamed as he came. Spurting clear ropes over his chest as Ilya rammed into his prostate. Shane tightened as he came, locking Ilya inside. The pressure was overwhelming. So good. So tight.

He came so hard the alpha’s vision whited out for a moment. Ilya blinked away the spots littering his vision so he could look down at his mate. Shane was sprawled across the couch cushions underneath him. His thighs still wrapped tightly around Ilya’s hips as if he might run away.

As if Ilya had anywhere else he would rather be.

He leaned down, running his tongue over Shane's heaving chest. He lapped up all of Shane's spent like it was the most delicious treat he had ever tasted. It tasted just like how he smelled. Floral and minty with a distinct musk that was all Shane.

The omega wrinkled his nose at Ilya cleaning him with his tongue, but he didn't push him away, so Ilya took it as permission.

They lay there for a while. Catching their breath and reveling in the skin contact.

Shane broke the silence a short while later.

“I am craving watermelon, really bad.” Ilya laughed at the sudden announcement.

“Okay. Anything else?”

“Yeah. And poutine.”

Ilya slowly pulled out, smiling all the while. “You going to put the watermelon on your poutine?”

Shane looked embarrassed, and that's all Ilya needed to know. He was absolutely going to do that. Ilya rolled his eyes, standing to rummage through a box and find wet wipes.

“Okay, I will go get your gross food.” He says casually. Throwing the wipes at Shane as he pulls his pants back over his dick. Shane looked sad that his view was taken away, but he just pouted and cleaned

himself.

Ilya loved how pouty Shane was when pregnant. It made him twice as adorable as he normally was, which was impressive, because Ilya already thought he was very cute and adorable.

Chapter End Notes

Нет ху́да без добра́. : Every cloud has a silver lining

положительная сторона : Silver lining (affectionate)

моя любовь : my love

Writing the gratuitous sex scenes of Hollanov is so easy. It's like Ilya possesses me to fuck Shane harder or smthing. You would never guess im irl asexual.

Chapter 7: Baby Proofing for Idiots

Chapter Notes

> Fair warning, the chapter is kind of heavy in the second half. We need to go into the less savory parts of fame before we can move onto the fluffy family stuff. Lowkey channeled all the parasocial stuff happening with Connor and Francois in this one. Those people need to go outside and eat grass; touching it isnt enough anymore fr
>
> But first ROZHOLLZY WEDDING
>
> if you read the first part before I edited, no you didnt

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The morning of their wedding smelled like rain and fresh-cut flowers, with a hint of strong coffee from the corner café down the street. The morning light spilled softly into the suite where Shane was adjusting the cuff of his white shirt over his bump. Four months in, and the baby was already a constant presence, tiny kicks and flutters reminding him of the life growing inside. He pressed a hand to his stomach, half in awe, half in nervousness. Shane hovered by the window, hands pressed to his stomach, staring out at the city lights fading under a soft dawn glow.

Ilya stood across the room, checking the knot of his tie for the fifth time. He was already dressed. Black suit, crisp white shirt. Hair damp from the shower, curls still rebellious despite the gel he massaged through it, framing the sharpness of his face. He stood in the middle of the hotel suite, checking and rechecking shoes, cuff links, and rings, while muttering under his breath in Russian.

It made Shane's heart beat faster every time he looked at him. His beautiful alpha. Soon to be his husband.

"You're staring again," Ilya said, smirking. "Are you nervous, or are you just imagining me undressing in slow motion like you always do?"

Shane rolled his eyes. "Both. Don't make me faint before we even leave the hotel."

Ilya grinned wolfishly. "I'd catch you."

“We’re going to be late,” Shane said, voice tight with nerves. He was wearing the white linen suit they’d picked together months ago. He felt impossibly small and impossibly important all at once.

They left together, hands brushing, fingers interlacing in a gentle clasp that felt like a lifeline.

The venue Yuna had booked was a quiet chapel on the outskirts of the city, small and intimate, with sunlight spilling through stained glass and dust motes catching in the beams like tiny sparks. She and Ilya wanted an elaborate wedding, but Shane just wanted something small and meaningful. Their baby would be the big event they needed to plan for.

Family and friends were the only guests invited: Jackie, Hayden, Shane’s parents, and even a handful of former teammates from both teams were seated, murmuring excitedly.

Shane’s nerves fluttered like tiny butterfly wings. Four months pregnant. Walking down the aisle. Committing his entire life to Ilya. He swallowed hard, took a deep breath, and focused on the man waiting at the end.

Ilya, for his part, looked impossibly steady. He was sharp and confident, but Shane could see the small tremor of excitement in his jaw. His hands gripped each other behind his back, and Shane imagined Ilya feeling every flutter the baby made, sensing it even without touching him.

The vows were simple. Shane promised to nurture their family, protect their children, and love Ilya through chaos and calm alike. Ilya promised to be Shane’s anchor, to cherish the life they were building, and to protect both Shane and their little one before they even took their first breath.

Shane cried as Ilya held his hands and gazed into his eyes while declaring his love. It made all of the stress feel worth it. All leading up to this moment before forever.

When it came time for the rings, Ilya held Shane’s hand, his thumb brushing against the soft curve of Shane’s stomach. Shane felt the baby kick for the first time that morning, right at that precise moment, and gasped.

“I feel it,” Shane whispered, tears brimming.

“I see it too,” Ilya replied, a barely suppressed laugh in his tone, voice soft, lips curving into the tiniest smile. “They kick because they know we are doing the right thing.”

He held Shane’s hand and slipped on a thick gold band. It was engraved with Ilya’s favorite endearment for him: солнышко. His little sun. Shane cried as he took the matching ring and slid it over Ilya’s finger. It was engraved with 愛しい人. Shane's beloved person.

Their lips met in the middle; the kiss was gentle and careful, tender, and full of promises of a new future together.

There was cheering from the small gathering as they pulled apart. Ilya lightly brushed over Shane’s cheek, tracing his freckles before moving lower, resting there on the curve of his stomach. The baby wriggled, as if in approval.

Confetti fell around them in slow spirals of white and gold, tossed over them as they walked down the aisle to the church doors.

Before leaving the church steps, Shane paused and pulled his husband to him. Ilya immediately reached for him, a steady hand on his back and stomach. Shane pressed a hand over Ilya’s against his stomach, feeling the warmth of his mate and the tiny flutter of their baby in the same moment.

“You’re ours now,” Shane whispered, voice cracking. “All mine.” The possessiveness was said out loud, but the seriousness was hidden behind a gentle laugh.

Ilya kissed him again, laughter in his chest. “Forever, I am forever yours, Shane. Always.”

Yes, Shane thought. You are.

—

They barely made it through the door of their hotel before Ilya was all over him. He was licking into Shane's mouth to catch the sugary grape juice he had at dinner after their wedding. Licking, biting, *devouring.*

Ilya pressed him back into the hotel door, caging him in between his arms. It brought back memories of their rookie days. Pressed against the hotel door with Scott Hunter right next door. Ilya must have been

thinking about something similar when he pressed his face into Shane's neck and growled at his blooming scent.

“Do you remember when you gave me first blow job?”

Shane shivered but nodded.

Ilya’s hand came up to press down on Shane’s shoulder gently, pressing him to his knees. Trapped between the door and Ilya’s thick body, the only thing he could do was lean forward and nuzzle into his crotch.

Shane let out a soft, needy sound as he breathed in his husband's scent. Rich and musky. Mouth watering, he immediately reached to unbuckle Ilya’s slacks with shaky hands. Ilya reached down and helped, ripping his belt open and tearing down the zipper as if it offended him.

Shane hums happily as he presses his mouth into his dick through the tight fabric of his briefs. Mouthing along the length before catching it at the tip. Sucking greedily as Ilya shakes above him. “Jesus, princess. You want more?”

Shane hummed in confirmation but was too drunk on his scent to pull away. Ilya’s chest felt warm as he ran a hand through Shane’s hair and used his other hand to push his underwear down below his balls. He smooths Shane's hair gently before gripping the back of his head and bringing it forward to his cock.

Shane immediately opens his mouth and lets him sink his cock into the velvety heat. “Oh fuck,” he gasps as Shane sinks down on him. Throat relaxing until the head hits the back of his throat with a small choking sound. It is impossible for him not thrust it into his mouth.

Shane chokes a little, so Ilya stops moving, but the omega immediately cries and wraps his hands around the back of Ilya’s thighs. Forcing him forward until his cock is fully seated in his throat.

Shane moans, and the vibrations make his knees go weak. The door was the only thing holding him up. Reaching down, the alpha pulls Shane off of his dick, shuddering as it slides out of the wet heat. “Come here, baby.”

Carefully pulling Shane back up to his feet and hefting him up in his arms, carrying him into the bedroom with little fanfare. Shane laughs as he is placed on the bed, and Ilya blows a loud, wet raspberry on his

belly button.

Shane looks up at him with hooded brown eyes, biting his wet lips teasingly. “You gonna fuck me, Ilya?”

As if that was even a valid question. Ilya just stares at him darkly as he sheds the rest of his clothes. An unbuttoned shirt hangs open, framing his thick pecs and defined abs when Shane leans forward to run a delicate hand over the heated skin.

“Do you miss my old body?” Shane tilts his head, looking from Ilya's toned torso to his own, a rounded stomach pushing the buttons of his dress shirt to near failure. He knows his omega is insecure, but it's unreasonable. He grabs Shane's hand and pushes him backwards into the duvet.

“Your body is most beautiful thing I have ever had privilege of seeing.” He says reverently while unbuttoning each button slowly, revealing soft, milky-white skin beneath. He leans down and starts kissing each inch of skin as it is revealed.

“You are amazing. Beautiful. Gorgeous. *Mine.”*

Shane gasps as Ilya reaches his pants and palms him over the tented fabric. Squeezing rhythmically. “Please,” he begs.

“Please what?’ Ilya asks meanly, while unbuttoning his slacks.

“I need you.” Shane is keen, high, and needy. Begging to be touched, to be pleasured.

The next few moments are a blur for Shane as he is suddenly naked, and Ilya has a pillow shoved behind his back while pushing Shane's knees to his chest. He isn't as flexible as he used to be, but Ilya’s enthusiasm to eat him out is overriding every other thought in his brain.

“Oh my god,” he whines as Ilya’s tongue dips into his hole and eats him like a starved man. The sounds of his slurping, sucking, and moans reverberated through Shane's body as he chased his orgasm. Barely coming up for air, ilya sucks his hole, forcing his tongue deeper and pulsing it into him at a rapid pace.

Shane jerks as he comes untouched, screaming and trembling, hands scrambling for purchase on something. One hand twists into the sheets, and the other tangles in Ilyas's gelled curls. Ripping the alpha

up by his hair and pulling him onto.

“Fuck me, please, please, I need it.” Shane cries, a sob ripping from his chest.

Ilya kisses him, uncaring of where his mouth just was. His eyes are glazed in the way they get when drunk on Shane's pheromones.

He barely acknowledges Shane’s demand as he rubs his cockhead over the sensitive hole, moaning loudly as it kisses his head. Sinking in has both of them groaning into each other's mouths. His cock is so thick and slides so deeply into Shane that his eyes roll to the back of his head.

“Mm fuck, Shane. Not going to last.”

Shane grabs Ilyas's hair again to pull him to his mouth. Shaking his head to show he doesn't care. He just needs him to *fuck him.* The rolling grind Ilya starts makes sparks tingle across Shane's skin in unbelievable waves. His head caught Shane’s prostate with every nasty circle.

“Yes, yes. Faster.” Shane begs. Clutching Ilya’s head to his chest. “More Lya!”

And Ilya takes that personally. He pulls himself from Shane's weakened arms and braces his hands against Shane's thick hips and *pounds* into him. It forces Shane up the bed, sliding across the soft cotton until his head is against the headboard.

“Such a good boy, Shane.”

The praise barely registers past the blood pounding in his ears, but his body reacts automatically, pushing up his chest and grinding his hips back into Ilya’s with greedy demand.

“Gonna cum.” Shane whines, crying from the overstimulation. Of how well his husband is fucking him.

“Yeah? Gonna cum on my cock?”

And that's all it took. The growl in his alpha's voice and his cock kissing his cervix. Shane came apart at the seams. Crying in the sheets and shaking uncontrollably as Ilya leans down and grinds deeper until his knot catches.

Pumping Shane full of his seed. Just like he should be.

The comedown was hard. Ilya licked over Shane's neck. Nipping over his mating bite and leaving new hickies all over his chest.

“I love you,” Ilya whispered into Shane's ear, biting the crest softly.

“I love you too, Alpha.”

___

As they settled into their new home and their new lives, every absurd, expensive thing Ilya had once owned to prove something to the world vanished one by one.

The cars went first.

The low-slung sports cars that scraped pavement and screamed excess. The ones that went too fast, handled too sharply, invited recklessness. He sold them quietly, efficiently, and without ceremony. There were no farewell photos. No last drives. Just paperwork and transfers and a hollow feeling he didn’t want to examine too closely.

He replaced them with a dark gray Mercedes SUV.

It wasn’t beautiful. It wasn’t loud. It didn’t turn heads.

But it had impeccable safety ratings. Collision alerts. Lane assist. Blind-spot warnings. Reinforced frames. Child locks that he tested himself, opening and closing the doors again and again until the click felt reliable beneath his fingers.

For the first time in his life, Ilya chose something not because it made him feel powerful, but because it might keep someone alive. Keep his family safe.

That realization unsettled him more than he expected.

He spent an entire afternoon reading about car seats.

Not skimming. Reading. Analyzing.

Rear-facing versus forward-facing. Anchor points. Crash test data. Statistics that made his stomach tighten in grotesque, unpleasant ways. He googled impact diagrams to make sure they were survivable.

He imagined the twisted metal and outcomes no one ever survived. He closed the laptop and then opened it again. Read more. He took notes he pretended weren't notes.

Shane found him hours later in the garage, seated on the concrete floor. He was surrounded by the disassembled stroller parts, and the car seat manual was open in his hands like something sacred.

"You're scowling at it," Shane murmured gently, noting the tense line of the alpha's shoulders.

Ilya didn't look up. "It must be installed correctly."

There was no humor in his voice. No bravado. Just an iron certainty.

Shane wanted to laugh, but he held it back. Ilya was going to be a wonderful father. He was taking this so seriously, probably more seriously than he had taken anything else in his whole life. It made warmth bloom in his chest, not because it was funny, but because it was so *him*. So serious. So devoted. Ilya glanced up at the sound Shane must have let slip, confused for a moment, as if unsure why Shane found this worth smiling over.

"Why you smile? This is very serious." Ilya's eyebrows were furrowed in annoyance.

Shane just bit his lip. Shaking his head. "Of course it is, Baby. I am just proud of you." Shane went back inside, leaving his mate to his task.

The obsessive baby-proofing followed.

Where Ilya had once been oblivious, he became aware of every deficiency in their new house. It crept into their lives slowly at first, then all at once.

Ilya became the number one subscriber of home improvement dads across the internet. Their online shopping carts were full to the brim of home improvement supplies. Every moment Ilya wasn't at the rink or doting on Shane, he was at a home improvement store with a very serious checklist.

Corner guards appeared on sharp edges. Cabinet locks clicked shut beneath sinks and counters. Outlet covers filled the walls like small white shields. Ilya measured stair railings twice. Then a third time, just to be sure. He anchored furniture himself, refusing help, muscles

tight with focus as he drove screws into studs like he was bracing the house against an oncoming storm.

Shane teased him gently for it. It was funny how the giant alpha crawled around their house looking for issues only a baby would see. It was sweet the way he crouched to test latches, tugged at shelves, and pressed his full weight against the anchored dressers like he expected them to fail him.

But there was something achingly tender beneath it.

Ilya had spent his entire life believing the world was dangerous because *people* were dangerous. Because love could be taken. Because family was something you lost.

Now, the world felt dangerous because it could hurt what he loved. And that terrified him more than any headline ever had.

So he prepared. Quietly. Methodically. Obsessively.

Like if he could make the walls safe enough, the floors soft enough, and the locks strong enough, maybe the universe would finally leave his family alone.

—

Shane's pregnancy was… easy.

Not effortless, but kind.

His hips ached. His back protested if he stood too long. But emotionally, he felt steady. Content.

He waited for the body dysmorphia to hit, as all the mommy magazines said it did. He expected to mourn his hard-won physique from hockey, but he never really did. It was probably because of how Ilya looked at him. His hazel eyes were roaming over Shane like he was a thick, juicy steak every time he saw him naked. It did a lot for his self-esteem.

Sometimes he caught his reflection and paused, hand resting over the gentle swell of his stomach. It made him proud to be able to grow and nurture these little lives inside of him. For so much of his life, the idea of pregnancy was a horror story, but now?

Now he can't imagine a life where he didn't choose this. Didn't choose Ilya and himself. Choose to make a family. It felt freeing in a way. Doing what his body was made for and with the person he loved most in the whole world.

The twenty-week appointment felt routine.

Shane told himself that as he changed into the paper gown, folding his clothes with unnecessary care. Blood tests, anatomy scan. Measure everything. Confirming everything was normal.

Routine.

The technician came in with a warm smile and a cart full of equipment. She introduced herself, asked a few general questions, and dimmed the lights.

Shane lay back; the gel was cool against his skin as the tech squished it around with the probe. He watched the technician's face more than the screen. Ilya hovered near the chair, pretending not to be nervous and failing badly. He had been reading too much. He had spent hours browsing through baby care manuals and parenting blogs over the past few weeks. He asked way too many questions on Reddit forums for new parents.

All of that to lead up to this moment. He now stood with his arms crossed, jaw tight, and eyes flicking between Shane and the screen, like something might go wrong if he wasn't watching closely enough.

"You're allowed to sit," Shane murmured, annoyed by the alpha's fidgeting.

"I am fine," Ilya said immediately. Obviously not fine.

Shane rolled his eyes at his alpha. Such a worrywart.

Shane was soon distracted, though, when the tech squeezed more gel onto his stomach, making him suck in a breath, then relaxed as the probe moved to smooth it onto his skin. The screen flickered to life in soft gray shapes that meant nothing until suddenly they did.

"There we go," the technician said finally, voice cheerful. "The heartbeat looks strong."

Shane felt his chest loosen. He hadn't realized how tightly he'd been holding himself until that moment. Ilya's fretting was getting to him.

The last appointment had been fine as well. Shane wasn't sure why he always expected the baby to be gone when he came to the doctor.

Ilya leaned in, hazel eyes sharp and tracing every inch of the grainy image.

The tech was quiet as she measured and annotated her forms. The clicking was loud in the small room, and the silence began to feel heavy.

Minutes passed. Too many minutes.

Finally, she paused, tilting her head slightly, and then adjusted the angle. Shane's fingers tightened on the paper sheet. "Is everything okay?"

"Oh, yes," she said quickly. "Everything looks very normal." But she didn't move on. She adjusted the probe again and moved it circularly before pressing in a bit harder than before. Shane grabbed at Ilya's hand to ground himself.

"I'm just going to take a few more measurements."

Ilya shifted on his feet and straightened. "Why?"

She smiled gently. "Sometimes babies like to hide."

Shane nodded, trying to breathe through the sudden pulse of anxiety under his ribs.

The room was quiet except for the hum of the machine and the technician's steady commentary: femur length, spine, organs, all normal.

Then she stopped; it seemed like she finally found what she was looking for because she made a quiet, victorious sound. She stared at the screen with big eyes and a twitch to her lips. Shane felt it before she said anything, the air changing, the way silence grew heavier instead of lighter.

"I'm going to show you something," she said carefully. "And I want you to tell me what you see."

She tilted the screen toward them.

Shane squinted. Shapes overlapped. Something familiar and something… extra.

“That’s… a head?” he said uncertainly.

“And?” she prompted.

“And another—” Shane stopped.

His breath left him in a rush.

Ilya leaned closer, confusion knitting his brow. “That is not… normal for baby.”

The technician smiled, warm and certain now. “No. It’s another baby.”

The words didn’t land all at once. Shane’s brain stalled. Rebooted. Rewound her words and replayed them.

“Another baby,” he echoed faintly.

“Two strong heartbeats,” she said. “Twins.”

Shane laughed. Soft, stunned, breathless. His hands flew to his mouth, then to his stomach, like he might anchor himself to reality.

“Oh,” he laughed in shock. “Oh my god.”

Ilya stared at the screen. His knees went weak. Color was draining from his face.

“Ilya,” Shane said immediately, reaching for him, realizing what was about to happen.

“I am—” Ilya started, and then the world tilted.

Ilya came to, mortified and shaken, Shane laughing through tears, and the technician apologizing profusely while assuring them that fainting was not uncommon for surprised fathers. “I should have sat down when you told me to.” He muttered to Shane from the floor.

Later, when the room was calm again, and Ilya was drinking an apple juice out of a tiny box, he sat holding Shane’s hand like it was the only thing keeping him upright.

“Twins,” he whispered, awe-struck. “We made twins.”

The tech was still smiling at them, happy to bask in their elation.

“Do you want to know the gender or wait?”

Ilya snapped his head towards Shane. They hadn't talked about it, but Shane wanted to know. He nodded.

The tech clicked a few buttons and printed a slip of paper with the sonograms. "Boys, both of them. We can check for their secondary genders with a blood test if you want to as well."

Shane squeezed Ilya's fingers. "Boys."

The alpha looked pale again, so he just squeezed Shane's hand back weakly.

"Yes, can you please run the secondary gender test?"

The nurse nodded and entered the information on the computer. "I'll go tell the lab. It should only take 30 minutes or so. We will call you with the results if you want to leave." She looked over at Ilya, wondering if the big man was going to faint again.

"That would be great, thank you."

Shane got off the table and pulled at Ilyas's arm to get him up. "C'mon, you big baby, let's go get ice cream."

They left with pictures in an envelope and a future that had suddenly doubled in size.

They received the call an hour later while Shane was knee-deep in a hot fudge sundae. Alphas. Both of them. The nurse explained that most identical twins had the same designation. It made sense.

Shane would never tell Ilya, but he was relieved that they weren't Omegas. Life was so much easier for alphas. Especially if their boys got into sports.

They needed to buy more baby furniture for the nursery. Finding out they were having twins meant two of everything. Ilya didn't want to buy anything online that he couldn't see in person first. He was obsessed with safety ratings and lead paint.

They told themselves it would be quiet. If they went to the store in a

smaller city, they wouldn't be as easily recognized. Shane lived in that delusion as Ilya parked the car and walked with Shane toward the sliding glass doors of IKEA.

The sky was low and gray overhead. Shane's fingers were curled into the sleeve of Ilya's coat, knuckles pale, his other hand resting unconsciously under the round curve of his stomach. Six months had changed his body in ways he could no longer pretend were subtle. The weight of his boys pulled at his spine, at his balance, at the way the world looked at him.

This was the first time he had been out in public like this since retiring with the Metros. They had released a brief statement that Shane was on leave due to personal family matters and would not be returning for the rest of the season. It had caused a stir, but when no further questions were answered, it seemed to be put on the back burner due to more exciting things happening in the hockey world.

Ilya wrapped his arm low on Shane's back as he grabbed a big cart. Shane tried to breathe through the anxiety. It wasn't like he was going to war. Just fluorescent lights, concrete floors, and the smell of new furniture.

At first, no one noticed.

Or maybe they did, but they didn't *recognize.* Not immediately anyway. Ilya noticed how people started making cursory glances their way before moving on. Seeing a pregnant omega in public was as common an experience as anything else. It was the way their eyes slid back a second time, lingering just a fraction too long as if something was different this time.

Shane felt it in his chest before he saw it happen, that tightening awareness, that old instinct from years of being watched. His body shifted subtly, protective without being obvious, angling himself closer to Ilya. His hand settled at the small of Shane's back, warm and steady, thumb pressing slowly, grinding circles through fabric stretched tight over skin.

Then someone stopped walking. A man holding the tiny hand of a little boy wearing a Hollander jersey. His big brown eyes were wide as he sucked on his thumb. He tugged at his father to get his attention.

A sharp intake of breath, not even meant to be quiet, as he turned and came face-to-face with Shane and his archrival.

“Oh my god, it’s Shane Hollander!” He announced loudly.

Shane turned his head away instinctively to look around and see if anyone else heard him. Unfortunately, the motion exposed the pale, healed mating bite on the side of his neck. It caught the harsh showroom lighting, unmistakable in shape and placement. A mark that wasn’t a scandal anymore; it was a declaration.

With Ilya standing beside him, broad and unyielding, there was no ambiguity left to cling to.

Recognition rippled outward.

How could Shane have been so stupid? This is hockey country; how could he ever think nobody would notice him?

Phones appeared immediately, camera flashes lighting up the showroom like a fashion show walkway. The whispers and yelling multiplied. The roaring murmur of voices built until it felt like it was pressing against Shane’s ribs, crowding his lungs.

Is that Shane Hollander?

Is he—

Is that Ilya Rozanov with him?

Shane’s stomach clenched, not the baby this time, but fear. His pulse thundered in his ears, drowning out the showroom music, the distant clatter of carts, and the hum of voices that were no longer distant enough.

Why did he ever think this was a good idea?

“Ilya,” he said softly, the word barely making it past his throat. His fingers tightened in the fabric of Ilya’s sleeve. “I don’t—”

“You’re okay, солнышко,” Ilya said immediately, low and certain. He didn’t look away from the room, from the people staring too openly now. “Breathe with me.”

But the air felt too thick. Too hot.

Shane’s vision tunneled, the edges blurring as the weight of it all crashed down, the photos already being taken, the headlines forming in real time, and the certainty that this moment would belong to the public whether he wanted it to or not. He had known this would

happen someday. He just hadn't expected it to be as explosive as this. He didn't think he would experience it in real time.

“I can’t,” he whispered, chest stuttering. “I can’t do this.”

Ilya didn’t hesitate.

He didn’t argue or try to coax him through it. He simply turned, one arm firmly around Shane’s shoulders, his body a solid wall between Shane and the world. They left the cart abandoned in the aisle. They hadn’t even had the opportunity to pick anything out yet.

The doors slid shut behind them, muting the noise, and Shane sagged into Ilya’s side as the cool air hit his face.

They didn’t go home.

Ilya drove straight to his parents’ house.

Yuna didn’t ask a single question when Shane stepped inside and broke apart in her arms. She smelled like ginger and soy and something warm simmering on the stove, and Shane clung to her like he used to when he was a child, breath hitching as the adrenaline drained out of him.

David appeared a moment later, steady and calm as ever, a hand warm between Shane’s shoulder blades. “You’re okay,” he murmured easily, like this was a given, like there had never been any doubt. “You’re home.”

They didn’t ask any questions even after the food was served without ceremony. Soup was placed in front of Shane. A cup of tea was pressed into his hands. Something solid to anchor him to his body again. Ilya sat close, their knees touching, his presence constant and reassuring.

They already knew what happened. That means it was already flooding social media.

Eventually, the shaking stopped.

Eventually, Shane could speak.

“They’re going to say things,” he said quietly, staring into his bowl. “They already are.”

Yuna reached across the table, her grip gentle but unyielding. “People

always do.”

David nodded, his mouth quirking into a soft, knowing smile. “That doesn’t mean they get a vote on how you choose to live your life, baby.”

Shane swallowed, the words thick and horrible in his throat. “Carter’s still around. Still pregnant. Still in Boston. And everyone thinks Ilya had something to do with what happened to him.”

“I know,” Yuna said softly. “And I also know what kind of man you love.” She said as she looked at Ilya. He was sitting sideways in his chair, bracketing Shane with his legs so he was as close as he could be without touching him. She knew Ilya understood when her son was too overwhelmed for touch. It made her heart hurt.

Her thumb brushed over Shane’s knuckles. “What matters is that you are happy. That you are safe. That you are loved. And this family—” she gestured around the table, “—isn't conditional. We can handle whatever those vultures have to say. We always do.”

David leaned back, folding his arms comfortably. “You and those babies? You’ve got us. Always.”

Shane finally turned to look at Ilya. His mate was a warm, steady presence at his side. A wall of muscle and Russian stubbornness.

The alpha had been quiet, watchful, his focus never straying far from Shane. When their eyes met, Ilya reached for his cheek and held it, firm and grounding.

“Nothing changes. We will have our boys, we will build their nursery, and we will have a family,” Ilya said, voice steady.

And for the first time since the doors of IKEA had slid closed behind them, Shane believed him. Ilya never lied to him about his devotion.

They could handle this storm together, as a family.

The fallout didn’t arrive all at once.

It seeped in slowly.

Shane woke to his phone vibrating against the nightstand, the sound sharp enough to pull him out of sleep before the screen even lit. For a

few seconds, he didn't move. He lay there listening to the buzz fade and then start again, his hand instinctively sliding to his stomach as if bracing for impact.

By the time he reached for it, there were already dozens of notifications stacked on top of one another, unfamiliar usernames and headlines bleeding together.

His name was trending.

Not for a game. Not for a comeback. Not even for retirement. The photos had spread while he slept. The internet was already swollen with speculation and certainty masquerading as fact. Not headlines yet, at least not official ones. Just trending tags, half-formed speculation, and threads that multiplied faster than he could read them.

The photos from IKEA spread fast, badly framed and shot from too far away, the kind of images people dismissed as speculation. By midmorning, they were clearer. Zoomed. Cropped. Annotated. Someone had frozen a frame where his hand rested unconsciously at his stomach, circled the curve as if it were a flaw instead of a life. Another had isolated the healed mating bite at his neck, magnified it, and labeled it.

Evidence.

Then the edits started.

Side-by-side images followed quickly. Old footage from Montreal games, Shane lean and fast and sharp, placed beside screenshots from security footage and paparazzi angles. Arrows drawn with surgical confidence, circles outlining the curve of his stomach, the healed mating bite at the side of his neck highlighted like evidence in a trial. Someone slowed the footage frame by frame. Someone else posted timestamps.

No official statement followed, but none was required. The public filled in the silence with confidence.

From rivals to mates.

A secret relationship hidden in plain sight.

A pregnancy kept quiet until it couldn't be kept quiet anymore.

Shane put the phone down.

Across the room, Ilya was already awake.

He sat at the edge of the bed, shoulders tense, scrolling silently, jaw set in a way Shane recognized immediately. That was his thinking face; the one he wore when he was calculating consequences instead of reacting to them.

Neither of them spoke.

They didn’t need to.

By midmorning, the silence had grown teeth.

By the afternoon, the tone shifted. No official statement came. No denials, no confirmations, no carefully curated photos to soften the blow. The absence of response was interpreted as confidence, then as arrogance, then as guilt, depending on who was talking. Shock curdled into entitlement. Analysts spoke with practiced authority about timelines they had no right to dissect, replaying seasons and trades as if they were breadcrumbs deliberately left behind.

Commentators framed it as a betrayal of fans, of teams, and of narratives that were supposed to belong to everyone but them.

Shane stopped reading sometime after lunch.

He sat at the kitchen table with his mom, one hand wrapped around a mug he hadn’t touched, the other resting against his stomach as if to anchor himself. Ilya moved through the house quietly, talking with David quietly so Shane couldn't hear their tense conversations. He didn’t answer any calls, letting every unknown number go to voicemail.

“I’ll handle it, baby.” She whispered to him in Japanese. She often reverted to her mother tongue when she was stressed. Shane just smiled back at her weakly.

Fans felt betrayed that they hid their relationship, that they were building a family without their permission. As if that was a requirement of their fame. Shane knew how parasocial his fans could be.

By the second day, Carter’s name surfaced.

At first, it surfaced cautiously, dragged back into relevance by users scrolling far enough to remember the earlier scandal and the uncomfortable coincidence of his sudden disappearance. Carter Moses had gone silent not long after Shane forced his early retirement. Nobody invited him to interviews, no red carpets, no public appearances, and the industry had quietly moved on without him.

Hollywood had moved on with its usual indifference.

But Carter himself hadn't vanished. The photo appeared without warning.

Someone photographed him in Boston, visibly pregnant, alone, stepping out of a clinic with one hand braced against his lower back and the other wrapped tightly around a coffee cup. No stylist. No handler. No smile. The image was unpolished in a way that unsettled people more than any headline ever had.

The narrative shifted again, sliding neatly into place. The internet latched onto it with vicious efficiency.

Questions stopped orbiting Shane and settled squarely on Ilya.

The timing was too obvious to ignore. Carter's career evaporated. Ilya's contract ended. Shane reappeared, mated and pregnant, beside the alpha everyone already believed capable of bending the world to his will. The story wrote itself in the way the public preferred: powerful men, quiet consequences, and problems handled behind closed doors.

No one asked for proof. All the evidence from the paps and fans was enough proof in the court of public opinion.

Headlines sharpened their language, leaning into implication without ever quite naming it.

Did Rozanov silence Carter Moses?

When influence becomes a weapon.

The cost of crossing the wrong alpha.

Ilya said nothing.

Shane said nothing.

And in the absence of denial, the story settled, solidifying into

something ugly and persistent, something that followed Ilya's name wherever it appeared. It clung to the alpha like a second shadow. Carter became a cautionary tale. A warning. Ilya became the villain the narrative required.

What the public never noticed was how deliberately he stepped into that role and how little he did to step back out again.

The narrative followed Ilya onto the ice.

Training camp with the Ottawa Centaurs opened under a weight he hadn't carried before, the kind that settled into his shoulders before he ever laced his skates. The facility buzzed with attention that felt sharper than usual, reporters lingering longer, cameras tracking his movements with intent instead of admiration, and teammates watching him with a mix of curiosity and caution.

He was used to being famous. He was not used to being under a microscope.

No one asked him directly about Carter Moses. They didn't need to. The absence spoke loudly enough on its own.

On the ice, Ilya played with restraint that felt almost surgical. His skating was precise, controlled, and stripped of the reckless flair that had once defined him. He conducted checks cleanly, avoided penalties, and passed with deliberate patience.

It was efficient hockey, disciplined and punishing in its consistency, and it unsettled people who expected anger or spectacle.

It wasn't Rozanov's hockey.

It was Hollander's.

The Centaurs' coaching staff noticed immediately. So did the team.

In the locker room, the atmosphere shifted in ways that were easy to miss if you weren't looking for them.

Conversations dipped when he entered, not silence; it was never that obvious. It was just a subtle lowering, voices recalibrating around his presence. A few glances flicked his way, quick and curious, before returning to their original focus. It reminded him of walking into a

room with a loaded weapon visible at his side. No one panicked. No one challenged him. They just adjusted.

He pretended not to notice.

Younger players watched him more openly. Not with fear, exactly, and not with the hunger he was used to from rookies trying to measure themselves against him. This was different. They studied him for cues: how early he arrived, how methodically he taped his sticks, and how he cooled down instead of collapsing onto the bench. They watched how he behaved when cameras hovered at the edges of practice, lenses lingering a second too long.

Ilya didn't give them anything extra.

He didn't puff his chest or sharpen his tone. He didn't explain himself or offer reassurances that would only sound like guilt in another mouth. He showed up early. Left late. Let the ice speak where words would be cut apart and rearranged into something unrecognizable.

If they needed proof of who he was, it would be in his stride, not his statements.

The crowd was less forgiving.

Ottawa fans cheered him because that was what they did for winners. After all, loyalty was easier than doubt when the points kept coming. But there was an edge beneath it, a hesitation that surfaced whenever the game slowed. Whenever his stick lingered too long along the boards or a hit landed a fraction harder than necessary.

Away games were worse.

Booing bled into chants. Rhythmic and relentless, echoing through arenas that had once roared his name with admiration. Signs appeared behind the glass. Some were clever, some were crude, and all of them were brimming with confidence in a story they believed they understood better than he ever could.

There were moments during games when Ilya felt it. A pressure that was building behind his sternum that had nothing to do with exertion.

It crept in during stoppages, when the arena noise pooled instead of crashing, when his breath fogged the inside of his visor, and he had just enough time to think. A stick slashed at his ankle a second too late. A shoulder checked him harder than necessary along the boards.

Someone muttered something under their breath as they passed.

Normally, these were invitations.

Normally, he answered them.

Now, he cataloged them instead. Logged each one carefully, the way he'd once logged injuries.

If I react, they will say it proves something. If I don't, they will keep trying.

He could feel the edge of it. The instinct to end a problem decisively. His body remembered how. He had been trained for violence long before hockey had given it rules. It would be easy to let himself slip just half a step too far, to let a hit land with intent instead of precision.

The thought frightened him.

Not because he didn't trust his strength, but because he did.

He imagined the headline before it ever happened. The slowed-down footage. The freeze-frame. Analysts shaking their heads gravely, talking about "a pattern" and about "temperament." About how this was always who he'd been.

Ilya forced himself to breathe.

Count the strides. Watch the puck. Anchor himself to the game, not the noise.

There were shifts where his hands trembled faintly when he reached the bench, adrenaline pooling without release. He kept his gloves on longer than necessary so no one would notice. Pressed his tongue to the roof of his mouth until the impulse dulled.

He could not afford a single mistake, he thought. Not now. Not when everything they thought they knew about him and were waiting for the confirmation with greed in their eyes.

The fear wasn't of suspension or fines or losing the captaincy.

It was going home to Shane and seeing disappointment there.

Of Shane flinching when he raised his voice. Their babies felt his anger through Shane's body, absorbing it before they ever understood

the world.

So Ilya played clean.

Almost painfully so.

He let hard hits go unanswered. Skated away from scrums. Took deep, deliberate breaths when his instincts screamed at him to finish things the old way. Every game felt like holding a glass object in his hands while the crowd dared him to drop it.

He had played through pain before. Broken bones taped into compliance. Concussions that left the world ringing and indistinct. Injuries that screamed with every stride and demanded to be acknowledged.

This wasn't like that.

This was quieter. Heavier. The constant pressure of being watched, not for what he could do, but for what people believed he was capable of. The knowledge that every hit would be framed as intent, every moment of aggression reinterpreted as evidence of something darker.

They weren't waiting for him to fail on the ice.

They were waiting for him to confirm their fear.

Afterward, in the quiet of the locker room, he would sit with his head bowed and wait for the adrenaline to drain from his body. Until he no longer trembled with rage.

Only then did he allow himself to think, "I am not afraid of them."

I am afraid of myself.

At night, he went home.

To Shane.

To a house that smelled like food and clean laundry and something softer underneath; safety, perhaps, or certainty. To a nest that had grown larger with Shane's body, fuller with quiet laughter and the steady reassurance of life continuing despite the noise outside.

Shane fit against him perfectly, warm and solid and real, a reminder

that the world could believe whatever it wanted and still be wrong.

Whatever the league thought of him, whatever story they chose to repeat until it hardened into truth. This is what mattered. If the cost of protecting it was wearing the public's blame like armor, letting them sharpen it against him until they were satisfied, then it was a price Ilya had already decided to pay.

He had survived worse things than being misunderstood.

And this time, he wasn't surviving alone.

—

Shane watched games from the couch now. Like the WAG he was.

He built his nest carefully before puck drop, pillows arranged to support his back and hips, a blanket pulled up around his waist, even when the house was warm. He told himself it was comfort. He didn't admit it was protection.

The broadcast filled the living room with noise. Skates carving ice, the low thunder of the crowd, and the sharp whistle of the refs. When Ilya stepped onto the ice, the volume seemed to spike instinctively, as if the arena itself leaned forward.

Shane leaned back.

He tried not to watch the crowd shots. Tried not to read the signs pressed against the glass. But sometimes the camera lingered, and he caught glimpses anyway: words that made his stomach clench, faces twisted with certainty.

When the chants started, Shane muted the TV.

He could still hear them faintly, bleeding through the silence like a distant storm.

His hand drifted to his stomach without thinking, thumb brushing slow, absentminded circles as if to reassure them both. One of the boys shifted, solid and real, and Shane swallowed hard.

Every hit made his shoulders tense.

He knew how hard Ilya could play. He knew how carefree and violent

he was while maintaining control. Now, every collision felt loaded, every check a potential turning point. He watched Ilya skate away from provocation after provocation, watched him choose restraint again and again, and felt pride twist painfully with fear. His alpha was being *careful.*

They want him to snap, Shane thought. They want proof they were right.

When Ilya took a particularly brutal hit and didn't retaliate, Shane exhaled shakily, not realizing he'd been holding his breath. His heart pounded too fast, his body reacting as if he were the one on the ice.

During intermission, he turned the TV off completely.

The house felt too quiet without it. He could hear the refrigerator hum, the soft tick of the clock, and his own breathing. He wondered if Ilya could feel this, too, the way the noise followed him even when it stopped.

By the time the game ended, Shane was exhausted.

Winning or losing didn't matter the way it used to. What mattered was that Ilya came home intact. That he walked through the door with the same loving hugs and the same steady presence.

When Ilya finally did, hours later, Shane didn't ask how the game went.

He just reached for him.

And when Ilya held him, tight and desperate, Shane felt the tension bleed out of them both. The crowd, the chants, the fear, leaving only what was real.

Their Love.

Chapter End Notes

GROUP HUG

That one was a doozy. Luckily the next chapter is happy and fun and porny. I'm about halfway done with it, so it will probably be posted next Wednesday or sooner if I can get away with it at work.

Chapter 8: The Court of Public Opinion

Chapter Summary

> Shane finds his voice again and makes it everyone's problem. This will be the last chapter of Shane and Ilya angst.

Chapter Notes

> Fair warning, I will be referring to Shane as some version of "Mom" in the remainder of this fic. I prefer it to having 2 dads when Shane is literally giving birth. He is Mother. He will still be given he/him pronouns, though. It's just omega culture to be called "Mom" or "Mama" because I said so and I am god here
>
> If you don't like that, you can change it in your head or not read it, but you HAVE been warned!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Shane hadn't expected buying maternity clothes to feel like this.

The store was warm and softly lit, with racks spaced wide enough to accommodate bodies that were changing. It smelled faintly of cotton and detergent, nothing sharp or overwhelming. He liked that.

Shane's hips ached from walking too long, and he was grateful for the bench tucked near the fitting rooms when Hayden insisted he sit and rest.

"Those are hideous," Hayden said cheerfully, holding up a shirt patterned with cartoon animals.

"They're comfortable," Shane countered, already fond of the soft fabric.

"They look like they were designed by someone who hates pregnant people."

Shane laughed despite himself, the sound easing something tight in his chest. It felt good to be doing something ordinary. No cameras. No ice. Just fabric, his best friend, and the quiet acceptance that his body was allowed to exist as it was.

He didn't notice the woman at first.

She hovered near the edge of the racks, pretending to browse, her phone angled just slightly wrong. Hayden noticed before Shane did the way his posture shifted, shoulders squaring subtly.

“Hey,” Hayden murmured. “You okay?”

Shane frowned. “What?”

The phone came up fast.

“Oh my god,” the woman breathed, loud enough to carry. “It *is* you. I knew it,” she said, eyes flicking to his stomach. “After everything that’s been coming out, I knew you wouldn’t just disappear.”

Shane froze.

He hated how instinctive it was now, the way his body never reacted before but now immediately locked down, and the way his hand went to his stomach without conscious thought. The twins kicked in response, sharp little reminders that he wasn’t alone in this.

“I knew it,” she said, stepping closer. “I told my sister it was real.”

“Ma’am,” Hayden said evenly, already moving between them, broad shoulders cutting off her camera's view of Shane. “You need to step back.”

The woman ignored him completely, eyes fixed on Shane with something like triumph. “You lied to everyone. You *both* did. You think we wouldn’t notice?” she continued, voice sharp with vindication. “The timing. The silence. People don’t just vanish unless they’re hiding something.”

Shane’s heart began to race, a familiar dizziness creeping in at the edges of his vision. The store felt smaller suddenly, with too many mirrors reflecting him from every angle.

“I didn’t lie,” Shane said quietly. “I just didn’t tell you.”

“That’s not what people are saying,” she shot back. “That’s not what *he* said.”

Her face was growing red and purple from anger. “That’s not how it works,” she snapped, her tone vicious and full of hatred Shane had never directed at him before. “We supported you. We watched you. You don’t just get to disappear and come back like this. And now

there's scandals and cover-ups, and suddenly you're playing house?"

Her lip curled. "Do you know how that looks?"

Her gaze dragged, unashamed, over the curve of his stomach. Over the faint, visible outline of the mating bite at his neck. As if his pregnancy and his *children* were an abomination.

"You're ruining hockey, first the accusations, now this," she said bitterly. "You don't get to walk away clean when everyone else is paying for it," she continued, voice rising. "You made him leave Boston. You think you can just—"

"Stop," Hayden barked sharply. "Right now." The alpha was pushing into her space and glaring at her. Hayden wasn't the largest alpha, but he knew how to be intimidating. His face was full of anger at the way his best friend was being talked to. "How dare you talk to him like that!" He growled at her, his fangs snapping in her face.

A sales associate appeared at the edge of the aisle, uncertainty written all over her face. Other shoppers were staring at the commotion.

Shane felt his throat tighten. His palms were slick with sweat. He could feel the twins moving, agitated by his rising panic, and the guilt hit him hard and fast.

This isn't good for them.

"I need you to leave us alone," Shane said, firmer this time. "You're not entitled to my life."

The woman scoffed. "You wouldn't even *be* here without the fans."

Something inside Shane snapped.

"I'm here because I'm a human just like you," he said. His voice shook, but it didn't break. "Whatever lies you've decided to believe," Shane said, shaking, "they are not mine to carry." Standing slowly from his seat and approaching her angrily, "I am allowed to be human and have a family. I am *allowed* to mate with whoever I want; I am *allowed* to be human, and you do not get to ruin my happiness for your selfishness." Hayden was holding him back now. The woman holding her phone up was still recording but backing away in fear of his just fury.

"Parasitic fans like you don't get to decide what happiness looks like

for me. My life off the ice is *mine!*" he snarled into her face. Fangs snapping loudly in the quiet store.

Security arrived then, gentle but insistent. The woman protested loudly as she was escorted away, still shouting about betrayal and lies and ruined legacies.

"We deserved answers!"

"You don't just get to rewrite the story!"

"Everyone knows something's wrong!"

Shane sat down hard on the bench as soon as she was out of eyesight; the room was spinning.

Hayden crouched in front of him immediately. "Hey. Look at me. Breathe."

Shane pressed both hands to his stomach, grounding himself in the solid, real weight there. Slowly, the panic ebbed as a small foot pressed into his palm.

"I'm tired," he whispered, voice catching on a sob. "I'm so tired of pretending this is okay."

Hayden nodded. Voice quiet and cold, "This is what happens when people think rumors are the same as truth."

His eyes grew soft but serious. "Stop pretending it's okay. You are Shane Hollander. You are the best hockey player in the world. Being a mom changes literally none of that. This isn't okay, and you are allowed to fight back, Chouchou."

The sweet nickname made Shane relax. Hayden was right. He was allowed to have opinions about his life and how he expected to be treated.

That night, curled up at home with Ilya's arms locked around him, Shane told him everything. The store. The woman. The way fear had flared sharp and immediate, not for himself, but for the babies.

Ilya listened without interruption, jaw tight, hands steady.

When Shane finished, there was a long silence.

"I maybe like Pike a little bit now."

Shane burst out laughing at his ridiculous mate. “I know you already liked Hayden.” Ilya made an "eh" sound but smiled as he stroked Shane's hair.

“I think I am going to make a statement, not right now, but soon. When I'm ready,” Shane said finally. “I won’t let strangers feel like they can touch me with their opinions anymore. That they can approach me in public and attack me, or you.”

Ilya kissed the crown of his head, reverent. “I will stand behind you. Always, my love.”

Not *for* you.

Behind.

He loved that his alpha let him fight his own battles.

—

The bar was warm and crowded, the kind of place that smelled like fryer oil, spilled beer, and victory.

The team had claimed most of it after the win. The music was turned up too loud as laughter rolled over itself in waves. Screens replayed the final goal on loop, the crowd in the footage screaming even louder than the one pressed around the tables now.

Shane wasn’t drinking. Obviously, but he didn't like being cooped up at home when his husband was reveling in a win. He missed the camaraderie.

He sat tucked into a booth near the back, away from prying eyes and wandering hands. He didn't understand why people always wanted to touch his tummy and talk about his pregnancy. It was weird.

Ilya had deposited him here when they arrived and placed a basket of fries between his hands, grease staining the paper liner. His glass held soda water with a lemon wedge he hadn’t touched. Four months pregnant meant constant hunger and very specific cravings, and tonight it had been salt and potatoes or nothing at all.

He watched Ilya from across the room as he methodically picked through his fries.

He stood with his teammates, broad and magnetic, still flushed from the win. Someone clapped him on the shoulder. Another pressed a beer into his hand. Cameras drifted near him instinctively, drawn to the gravity he carried without trying.

Shane lifted a fry, chewing slowly, when he felt it. That subtle prickle at the back of his neck when he was being observed.

The woman approaching his booth didn't hesitate. Her confidence was palpable.

Rose Landry, Shane recognized. She moved through the bar like she belonged anywhere she decided to be. A wool coat open over a black sparkly top, hair styled with the kind of precision that pretended it hadn't taken effort. She wasn't drunk. She wasn't lost. She was *on a mission*.

"Mind if I sit?" she asked, already sliding into the booth across from him.

Shane blinked, surprised. Then he nodded. "Go ahead."

She glanced briefly at the fries. Smiled. "Smart choice. They have the best ones here."

"Pregnant," Shane said, gesturing vaguely at his stomach. "Drinking's not really on the menu."

Her eyes softened immediately. Not in pity, but recognition. "Congratulations, I am happy for you. And… yeah. That's a solid choice."

She followed his gaze to Ilya without being obvious.

"I know hockey," Rose said casually. "And I know who you are."

Shane stiffened just slightly.

She raised a hand. "Relax. I'm Canadian. My brothers played hockey for decades. It runs deep in this city, just like gossip."

She piqued his interest. She talked to him like they were already acquaintances. She was interesting. They talked for a few minutes about the game, the noise, and how exhausting celebrations were when you weren't the one celebrating. Rose mentioned she was in town filming and that her cast had dragged her out to blow off steam.

Then her expression shifted. Serious, careful. "I am going to say something, and it's not going to be what you expect, but just hear me out." Shane gazed at her under the dim lighting, "Okay." He hedged.

“You know Carter Moses,” she stated flatly. She doesn't say it like a question. The name hit like a sledgehammer to the solar plexus and it made him blink to reroute the conversation. Shane didn’t answer right away. He set the fry down and wiped his fingers on a napkin.

Rose took his silence as confirmation. She exhaled. “I thought so.”

“How much did he tell you, or Ilya?”

Shane shrugged, “Not much. He threatened Ilya with blackmail. I handled it, but he didn’t really explain why he was doing it.” He sighed and picked up another fry, waving it around as he continued. “He knows the baby isn’t Ilya’s, just like we both know that.”

She nodded slowly, absorbing the information. “He’s a nasty little leech, that’s for sure.” She stole one of his fries, then grinned when Shane made a startled sound and pulled them to his chest protectively.

She explained how Carter had blackmailed Miles, her alpha friend, into a manufactured baby trap. Threats, leverage, and a falsified paper trail that Carter swore would ruin him if he didn’t comply. However, the leverage he used had fallen apart under legal scrutiny. He didn't think it through that a successful A-list actor like Miles would have the best lawyers money could buy.

Miles had walked away cleanly, leaving Carter scrambling for someone else to blame.

“So he needed a villain,” Rose said, shrugging her shoulders as if shrugging the weight of this secret off of them, too. “Someone powerful. Someone intimidating. Someone he could point at and say, “*Look, it’s him instead*.”

Shane felt the click in his head as all of the pieces locked into place.

“He didn’t know about me,” Shane said.

Rose shook her head. “Not a clue. You two hid it too well.” She smiled sweetly. “That was his mistake. He was desperate and messy.”

“Would you be willing to send me the information from Miles so I can

clear my husband's name?"

Rose immediately perked up. "Of course! We would be happy to help. I just have one condition."

Shane eyed her warily. "Okay?"

She leaned forward and grinned, "I want to be your friend so bad. You're my celebrity crush."

The childish glee in her tone surprised Shane enough to make him laugh loudly. Ilya looked over at him, curious about what caused his joy, and raised an eyebrow at Rose sitting across from him. Shane just smiled and turned back to Rose.

"I would love to be your friend."

And she sealed it by stealing his drink, as friends do.

The story didn't break all at once.

It *detonated*.

It started with a single press release from Miles Calder's legal team, dropped at 9:02 a.m. on a Tuesday. Early enough to dominate the news cycle, late enough that it couldn't be buried.

PATERNITY CONFIRMED. COERCION ALLEGED. LEGAL ACTION PENDING.

Attached were documents no one could spin away: certified DNA results confirming Miles as the biological father of Carter Moses' baby, alongside affidavits detailing how Carter had manipulated and blackmailed him into a pregnancy without informed consent.

The language was brutal in its clarity.

Miles Calder acknowledges biological paternity and will assume full legal and financial responsibility for the child. He did not, however, consent to conception and was subjected to coercive reproductive manipulation.

Within minutes, the internet caught fire.

The first tweet hit before most people had finished their morning coffee.

@CalderLegal
The statements attached regarding Miles Calder, confirmed paternity, and allegations of reproductive coercion are all real and validated sources. Media inquiries will be addressed at 11 a.m.

Screenshots followed within seconds. Then PDFs. Then highlighted passages.

The phrase *"reproductive coercion"* leapt off the page and landed squarely in the middle of everyone's timeline.

At first, people were confused.

Then they got angry.

@filmnerd42
wait WAIT?! are we saying Carter Moses baby-trapped Miles Calder and then blamed an NHL player????

@PopCulturePriest
not "allegedly" btw. this is sworn affidavits + DNA. this is REAL.

@ex-carterstan
i can't believe i was caping for someone who baby trapped an alpha and blamed another one. insane behavior on MY part.

@internetashamed
carter really said "let me ruin an actor and an nhl player's life" instead of taking accountability. wild choice.

By the time Rose Landry stepped up to the podium that afternoon, her name was already trending, right below Carter's, which had climbed into the global top five with alarming speed.

Rose didn't bring notes. She didn't smile. She looked straight into the camera and said, calmly, "Carter Moses lied."

"He lied about Ilya Rozanov. He lied about Miles Calder. And he has been lying about how that child was conceived."

Someone gasped as she continued her speech. when she used the word *coercion,* all hell broke loose. Someone else started typing before she finished the sentence.

@roseknows
Rose Landry just said ‘coercion’ on live TV. oh this man is DONE.

@canuckcinephile
Oh girlypop did NAWT come to play games with this man. she’s not hedging. she’s not softening it. she came to END HIM.

@mediatrainingpls

every PR intern in hollywood just aged ten years watching this unfold

Then Shane posted.

No press tour. No sit-down interview. Just a single statement on his account that was proofread and approved by his mom. The background photo was a soft, unassuming picture of him and Ilya taken months earlier. Their faces turned slightly away from the camera, private even in hindsight as they sat on the end of the pier at his parents' cabin.

Shane Hollander ✓□

I chose not to speak earlier to protect my family and to allow the facts to be established without public interference.

Carter Moses made allegations against my partner, Ilya Rozanov, that he knew to be false. Those statements were made deliberately and for the purpose of deflecting attention from his own misconduct.

The allegations against Ilya Rozanov are untrue.

Ilya and I have been in a committed relationship throughout the relevant period. My decision to remain private was informed not only by the circumstances but by the fact that I am currently pregnant, and this whole situation is incredibly stressful.

We support Miles Calder in taking responsibility where it is due and in pursuing accountability for actions that occurred without informed consent.

The replies flooded in so fast they blurred.

Screenshots of Shane’s visibly pregnant stomach from earlier

appearances resurfaced within minutes.

Then the tone shifted, from confusion to rage.

@rinksideomega
WHY DID NOBODY TELL ME SHANE IS PREGNANT???? AND CARTER KNEW AND STILL LIED???

@nhltwtgirlie
nah because lying on a pregnant omega's family like that is EVIL behavior

@cancelthelies
baby trapping, false accusations, AND trying to destroy a man's career? blacklist immediately

@hockeytwtconvert

walked into this hating ilya, walked out learning about stanley cups and apologizing to a pregnant omega. growth.

Sports media picked it up next.

By that evening, Simon stood behind a podium with Ilya's team logo behind him, expression unreadable but voice steady.

"Mr. Rozanov was falsely accused," he said, pausing long enough for the cameras to click. "We now have independent confirmation that those claims were fabricated to obscure Mr. Moses' own misconduct."

He folded his hands.

"We will be pursuing legal remedies. Mr. Rozanov will not be engaging further."

Twitter exploded again.

@agenttea
when a manager says "legal remedies" that calmly you KNOW the lawsuit is nuclear

@hockeylawyer
this is one of the cleanest public exonerations I've ever seen

@rinksidechaos

carter had us arguing in his mentions meanwhile shane is pregnant and ilya was just… existing. Embarrassing.

@sorryilya

ILYA ROZANOV IF YOU SEE THIS I AM SORRY FOR CALLING YOU “SUS” ON MARCH 3RD

Carter tried to go live that night.

The clip lasted twelve minutes before it was ripped apart frame by frame.

Contradictions stacked up. Timelines didn’t match. His voice wavered where the documents hadn’t.

@threadcounting
Carter just contradicted his OWN affidavit from last year on live video omg

@receiptsdept
compiling a master thread of Carter Moses lies. it’s… long.

@mosesfiles

i can’t believe carter moses made me feel bad for TWO alphas. TWO. i owe god and my moots an apology.

@moralcompass404

he really JUST looked us dead in the eye and said “poor me” while committing reproductive coercion. jail. PRISON EVEN.

By the end of the week, studios quietly removed his name from upcoming projects.

Casting announcements disappeared.

Agents stopped returning calls.

Miles Calder released one final statement, accepting responsibility for the child and condemning the way his consent had been violated. The public reaction softened toward him almost immediately. Sympathy

replaced suspicion, and outrage was redirected where it belonged.

@alphadiscourse

i hate when the villain is hot and can act because why did i trust him. why did i write THREADS?!?

@cancelledbuteducational

the way this entire situation became a case study on false allegations AND consent. never defending a man off vibes again.

@fanbasecollapse

the fandom group chat is just apology screenshots and “i’m sick” texts right now

Carter Moses had wanted an audience; he wanted unfiltered attention.

So that is exactly what he got. He thought any publicity was good publicity. Keeping his name in the media was a good thing.

Miles Calder’s legal filings spoke for themselves. Rose Landry had testified. Simon’s statement had closed the door with professional finality. Carter Moses’ name became unsearchable without the word *"coercion"* attached to it.

After forty-eight hours, Carter Moses stopped trending.

Not because people had forgiven him, but because there was nothing left to say.

His name no longer sparked debate, only dismissal. Nobody was out there defending him anymore except fans who nobody listened to. His projects vanished from studio slates without announcement. Interviews that had once been scheduled weeks in advance were quietly canceled. When journalists brought him up, it was in the past tense, as an example of how fast public goodwill could evaporate when the truth finally arrived.

The internet moved on.

Ilya didn’t comment again. Neither did Shane.

Instead, a single photo appeared days later on Shane's account. There was no caption, no explanation. Just a booth at a diner, a basket of fries between them, Shane's hand resting over his stomach, Ilya's arm hooked loosely around his shoulders. No tags. No statements. Just a cute relationship post in the aftermath of Carter Moses.

It outperformed every press release.

Next came the formal announcement Shane had promised Ilya.

The room smells like recycled air and old carpet, the kind of place built for damage control rather than truth.

Shane recognizes it immediately. He's stood in rooms like this before, after losses, after injuries, after rumors that needed smoothing over with the right words and a cooperative smile. Back then, he'd learned how to say very little and still sound grateful.

This time, he doesn't intend to do that.

The podium feels higher than it should. Or maybe his center of gravity has changed. His stomach pulls forward, a constant, grounding weight, twins shifting in slow, uncoordinated movements that remind him he is not alone in his body anymore. He presses his palm briefly to the wood, anchoring himself before he looks up.

Cameras click. A low murmur ripples through the room and then quiets.

Ilya is there. Shane doesn't need to turn his head to know it. He feels him the way he feels the pull of gravity: solid, unmovable, deliberately close without crowding. Yuna sits to his right, composed and precise, her presence a shield sharpened by decades of experience. They are flanks. They are supportive. They are not here to speak *for* him.

This is his.

"I'm going to start by saying something that might make people uncomfortable," Shane says, voice steady despite the way his heart beats against his ribs. "That's not my problem."

A few reporters shift. Pens pause above legal pads. Shane let his gaze sweep the room.

“I’ve spent most of my adult life being accessible. Available. Grateful.” He lets out a slow breath. “I understood the deal. You cheer for me, and in return, you get parts of me. My performance. My injuries. My time.” He exhaled slowly. “I was good at it. Too good, maybe.”

He paused, letting the words land, glancing down briefly, then back up.

“But that deal never included my body in this way. It never included my family. And it certainly didn’t include lies being spread by people who wanted to rewrite the truth for their own gain.”

The room feels tighter now, like everyone leaned forward without realizing it.

“I didn’t hide my life because I was ashamed,” Shane continues, voice firm. “I protected it because it was fragile. Because it was new. Because I am carrying two children, and the only thing more important than transparency is safety.”

A flicker of discomfort passes through the crowd at the word *carrying*. Shane doesn’t soften it.

“I am pregnant with twin boys. That is not a headline. That is a medical reality. And it is not up for debate.”

He pauses, lets the silence stretch until it stops feeling awkward and starts feeling deliberate.

“There’s been a lot of talk about timelines. About secrecy. About what the public believes it was owed.” His mouth tightens. “I want to be very clear: choosing privacy is not theft. You are not entitled to access to my body, my relationship, or my children.”

He shifts his stance slightly as another slow roll of movement presses against his ribs. The sensation steadies him.

“Fame doesn’t mean forfeiture. Visibility doesn’t mean consent.”

Someone raises a hand. Shane doesn’t acknowledge it.

“I’m aware that speculation has extended beyond me,” he says. “I am aware that misinformation has spread, even after the truth came to light. My partner has been dragged into stories that were never his to carry. That stops now. Ilya does not need to defend himself. I will not allow my family to be used as props to satisfy anyone else’s moral

comfort."

Yuna shifts then, a slight nod, just enough to signal agreement, but she lets Shane continue.

"I understand that some people are disappointed. Confused. Angry." Shane shrugs slightly. "Those feelings are yours, and they are valid, but they do not belong to me. It is not my responsibility to hold those emotions for you."

A breath.

"I didn't make these choices to be inspirational for omegas in professional sports. I didn't make them to defy my public persona." His hand finally lifts from the podium and rests unconsciously over his stomach. " I made them because I wanted a life bigger than fear and gossip, and hockey. I made them because my family matters more than the noise of public opinion."

He lets that sit, letting the weight of that finality fill the room.

"I am healthy. My children are healthy. I am supported. I am loved." His voice wavers just slightly there, then steadies again. "That's the only update that matters."

Finally, he turns his head.

Ilya meets his gaze immediately. No question. No hesitation. Just presence.

Yuna speaks briefly, then, her tone calm and unyielding, reinforcing boundaries, reminding the room of privacy laws, medical ethics, and the consequences of continued harassment. She is surgical with it, precise and unmistakable. The professional manager she has always been.

When Ilya speaks, it is only once.

"My family is not a discussion topic," he says quietly. "This is not a warning. It is a statement."

He places his hand on Shane's back, firm and grounding.

Shane nods.

"That's all," he says. "There will be no questions."

And for the first time since his life became public property, he steps away from the microphone without asking permission.

The reaction is instant.

By the time Shane reaches the hallway outside the conference room, his phone is already vibrating in Ilya's pocket. Not a single notification, dozens stacked on top of each other, a cascading hum like a living thing. Yuna's device lights up as well, her expression sharpening as she scans headlines in real time.

The coverage fractures almost immediately.

Some outlets lead with restraint.

SHANE HOLLANDER SETS BOUNDARIES IN EMOTIONAL PRESS CONFERENCE

"FAME DOESN'T MEAN CONSENT": HOLLANDER SPEAKS OUT

Clips circulate of Shane's calm, measured delivery. His hand was resting protectively over his stomach. The moment, he said *"twin boys"* without apology or softness. Commentators praise his composure, calling it courageous and overdue. Former players tweet support. A few journalists, the ones who remember what it was like to be young and terrified, wrote think pieces that read less like analysis and more like a quiet apology.

But the other side was always louder.

HOLLANDER REFUSES QUESTIONS — WHAT IS HE HIDING?

ATHLETES TURN THEIR BACKS ON FANS

Panels erupt into arguments. Talking heads complain about tone, about attitude, and about how "cold" he sounded. Someone calls it "performative." Someone else says he weaponized pregnancy to shut down criticism. A pundit scoffs at the word *"consent"* as if it's an affectation rather than a boundary.

And threaded through it all is the shadow of Carter Moses.

The implication sharpens itself across threads and posts. He had been the villain. He had been caught lying, shamed, and publicly erased, but the questions linger: Why did it take so long to surface? How

much damage had been done while rumors spread? Could this have been prevented?

Hashtags fracture and reform. #TeamHollander trends alongside #ProtectTheTruth and #CarterExposed. Support tangles with critique until the distinction becomes almost impossible to parse. Some fans are still processing, trying to reconcile outrage with relief, with hashtags veering from *#CancelCarter* to *#ShaneStrong*.

Yuna exhales slowly as she locks her phone. “This will get worse before it gets better,” she says evenly. “You did the right thing.”

Shane nods, but the adrenaline hasn’t left his system yet. His body still hums like it’s braced for impact. He moves quickly down the hall until they reach a familiar, unused bathroom.

The door closes behind them.

The sound is soft. Final.

Shane breaks.

It isn’t dramatic. There’s no sobbing, no collapse. His knees don’t give out. He just… stops holding himself together.

His hands start shaking first.

Fine tremors run through his fingers and up his arms, as if his nerves are misfiring now that the danger has passed. He presses his palms together instinctively, like he can will them still, but it only makes him more aware of how hard he’s trembling.

“I—” His voice catches, sharp and unexpected. “I think I need—”

Ilya is already there.

Not rushing. Not panicking. Just closing the distance and wrapping both arms around Shane’s shoulders, pulling him in until Shane’s forehead presses into his chest. The scent of him, familiar and grounding. It hits Shane all at once, and his breath stutters.

“I’ve got you,” Ilya murmurs, low and steady, in Russian first and then again in English. “You’re safe. It’s done. You did so well; you’re so strong.”

Shane nods, face pressed against him, but his body doesn’t believe it yet. The shaking worsens, spreading through his torso. One of the

twins shifts sharply, reacting to the spike in cortisol, and Shane makes a small, broken sound. Dropping to his knees on the dirty bathroom floor.

“I didn’t mean to—” he starts and then stops, swallowing hard. “I wasn’t trying to be brave. I was just so tired of being scared.”

Yuna kneels in front of him, her voice gentler now than it was in the conference room. “That’s what bravery actually is.” She waits until Shane meets her eyes. “You didn’t fracture anything today,” she says quietly. “You stabilized it.”

Shane breathes, watching his mom’s chest rise and fall slowly, and tries to match it like he did when he was little. Ilya’s hand was moving in slow circles on his back, anchoring him. Shane’s shaking eases gradually, like his nervous system is remembering how to stand down. After a while, Shane pulls back just enough to look at Ilya. His eyes are red but clear.

“Did I do okay?”

Ilya doesn’t hesitate.

“You were extraordinary.”

Shane exhales, long and shaky. “Who taught you that word?” He teased softly.

Ilya shrugged. “I’ve been reading the boring New Yorker.” Shane snorts at the throwback line. And finally lets himself believe it.

It happens days later.

Quiet. Ordinary. Almost forgettable, which is why it matters.

Shane is sitting on a bench outside a small café, attempting to get used to being in public again, waiting for Hayden to finish ordering. He has one hand wrapped around a watery tea, the other resting on his stomach out of habit more than necessity. The weather is mild but warm. The street is quiet. For once, no cameras.

A woman hesitates a few feet away.

Shane notices immediately. The mild uncertainty, the way she keeps checking his face like she’s afraid she’s mistaken. She looks to be in

her thirties, wearing a long sundress that's seen better summers, with a paper bag tucked under her arm.

"I'm sorry," she says finally, voice careful. "I don't want to bother you."

Shane smiles softly. "You're not."

She exhales, relieved.

"I just wanted to say… thank you. For what you said." Her eyes flick briefly to his stomach and then back to his face, respectful. "I have two boys. Twins. And watching you stand up there and say you don't need permission to have a life—" Her voice wobbles. "It meant a lot."

Shane feels something unclench in his chest.

"I'm glad," he says quietly. "That means a lot to me, too."

She nods, eyes bright. "You look really happy."

He is.

He realizes it in that moment, not as an idea, not as something he has to defend, but as a simple truth. He is tired. He is scared sometimes. But he is happy.

"Yeah," Shane says, smiling wider now. "I am."

She wishes him well and walks away without asking for a photo, without reaching for him, and without trying to take anything.

Hayden returns with the drinks and raises his eyebrows. "That was… shockingly normal."

Shane watches the woman disappear into the crowd, one hand resting over the place where two small lives shift and grow.

"Yeah," he says again. "It really was."

And for the first time in weeks, the world feels like it might be able to hold him after all.

—

Shane decided on a whim that he wanted to be in the area when Ilya played for the final Stanley Cup before he became a father. He was worried, terrified even, but he wanted the pictures of the excitement, win or lose, to be on their walls for his babies to see. To know how amazing their father was.

The arena was a living thing, a roar of color and noise that threatened to swallow him whole. As Hayden helped Shane into the family and friends box above the main seating. The suite lights cut across the glass like blades, glaring and blinding, reflecting off the ice and bouncing across Shane's eyes, almost spotlighting him specifically.

Shane leaned slightly on Hayden's arm, each step deliberate and careful. Every shift of weight sent a dull thrum through his knees and hips, a constant reminder that he carried more than just himself now.

Shane pressed a hand to his stomach and felt a faint kick. Hayden noticed his pause. Stopping behind him and watching his reaction. "Are you okay?" Shane nodded, exhaling through his nose, but Hayden could see the tension coiled in his body. It was how Jackie looked when she was pregnant with his girls.

They had barely sat down in their seats when the puck dropped, and the arena erupted. Noise crashed over them, vibrating into Shane's knees and sending a thrill of electricity through him.

Ilya skated out, helmet on, and a grin plastered across his face. His teeth were flashing sharply, and his hair, stuck in damp strands, was peeking from under his helmet. The cameras found him immediately, as always. The fans cheered, some in awe, some in annoyance at him being their opponent, but Ilya barely noticed.

He chanced a glance up at the family box when the game was slow, Summers passing the puck to Haas on the far side of the rink. He watched Shane place a hand over his belly as the twins shifted. Tiny, insistent jabs that made Ilya's chest ache with something he hadn't let himself feel in months: awe, fear, and protectiveness. They were already claiming Shane, staking their territory in this world, and Ilya had to keep them safe while letting Shane live.

Ilya refocused on the game. Shane would never forgive him for losing because he was too busy ogling him in the stands.

The game intensified. Ilya won the first face-off, dashing down the ice

with the puck glued to his stick. Quick passes, slick toe drags, and sudden spins around defenders. A snapshot from the point cracked off the post, the rebound bouncing perfectly for him to slot home. Shane's eyes never left him; he could almost feel Ilya's fire magnified in his own chest. Seven and a half months pregnant, and here he was, judging his mate's hockey.

The next shift brought a crunch along the boards. Ilya absorbed a hard check, skated through it, and immediately jumped into a two-on-one break. He feinted, stick-handled between defenders, and wristed the puck past the goalie with a satisfying clatter. Shane cheered, his fist thrust into the air, the twins kicking in agreement at their father's skill.

During a power play, Ilya set up at the blue line, snapping a slapshot that rattled the netting and drew a chorus of cheers. He pirouetted back into position and tapped sticks with teammates in a silent rhythm of coordination and trust. Shane noted each flick, each check, each daring dive along the boards, and his chest swelled.

By the final period, the Centaurs were locked in a tight battle. Ilya's line cycled relentlessly, pinning the opposition in their own zone. Shane's pulse mirrored the game: rapid, exhilarated, and terrified. A last-minute penalty kill left Ilya one-on-one with a charging forward. He read the rush perfectly, stole the puck, and exploded up ice with a slick spin move that drew the crowd into a collective gasp. He deked the goalie, lifted the puck, and… scored. The arena erupted.

The Centaurs were drowning in cheers, tossing sticks, hugging, and lifting the trophy. Confetti tumbled like multicolored snow across the ice, cameras flashed relentlessly, and fans screamed in every direction. The arena was vibrating with every chant. Cameras flashed, fans screamed, and teammates laughed.

Ilya Rozanov should have been laughing with them. Celebrating with his team. Grinning for the cameras. But he couldn't. He needed Shane; he needed to share this moment with his mate.

He tore off his helmet and skated toward the stands, ignoring the roar, ignoring his teammates calling his name. Adrenaline burned through his veins, pushing him higher, faster. He vaulted the boards, ice spraying his skates, confetti sticking to sweat-damp hair.

Shane's eyes widened as he saw Ilya climbing the railing toward him. "Rozanov, what—" he gasped, but the words were cut off as Ilya

crashed his mouth into Shane's. Right there among the chaos of victory. The world faded behind their bubble of bliss. Ilya was sweaty and still wearing his skates (without his rubbers), but he couldn't have picked a better moment in his hockey career.

"Too tight, Ilya," Shane gasped out a laugh, pressing his forehead against Ilya's chest. "You're crushing me with your pads."

"Sorry, sorry, I needed to touch you," Ilya murmured, pressing a kiss to Shane's lips again, licking into his mouth in a way that was way too filthy for public. He pulled away and dropped to his knees. Nuzzling into Shane's stomach, "You and my little chaos duo… always need to touch you."

Shane laughed softly, tears prickling his eyes, wrapping his arms around Ilya's head despite the damp confetti and icy chill. "You do realize people are losing their minds right now?" he said, voice muffled against screaming fans.

"They'll survive," Ilya mumbled into Shane's lips, grinning. "Now they know how crazy I am about you."

Well, they certainly do. They were on the jumbotron.

Ilya was grinning, devilishly handsome, even as his heart continued to hammer as he stared down into Shane's eyes.

For a long moment, the noise of the arena faded into the background. Fans were cheering, cameras flashing, and the team still celebrating, but none of it mattered. There was only Shane, and the twins were growing safe in Shane's belly, and that was enough.

He pulled back slightly, holding Shane at arm's length just to look at him. "You're okay. All three of you. You're okay. My omega, my babies… my world."

Shane pressed his hand over Ilya's against his stomach, feeling the warmth beneath. "We're okay," he responded in a whisper that got swept away by the cacophony.

Shane laughed quietly, brushing damp hair from Ilya's forehead. Elated with adrenaline and love.

Even as they descended the stands safely, hand in hand, confetti in their hair, Shane felt the electric rush of having the world's eyes on them. Only, he didn't care anymore. He had Ilya. He had his babies.

And somehow, against all odds, he had the new notion that he could survive any arena, any headline, any rumor. As long as he had his family.

Chapter End Notes

be honest, can you guys tell im chronically online and read waaay too many social media au's?

Chapter 9: And Then There was Two

Chapter Notes

> Reminder, babies were conceived in December; this chapter is taking place in June/July, so Shane is 8ish months now, so get ready for babbbiiiieeesss.
>
> Pregnancy is low-key body horror to me, so I skipped that whole birth part and got to the good parts.
>
> I wanted to keep this upbeat and fun, so it may not be realistic, but these are MY Barbies, and this is MY Barbie dream house!
>
> Enjoy ;3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The confetti hadn't even settled when Ilya submitted his paternity leave. Summer stretched out ahead of them, bright and impossible, a chance to be with Shane and the twins before the world reclaimed him.

The soft smell of fresh paint and pine lingered in the nursery. Sunlight filtered through the blinds, casting golden stripes across the floorboards. Shane sat on a stool on the plastic-covered carpet, carefully rolling the last coat of pale green onto the wall while Ilya adjusted the crib so it sat perfectly perpendicular to the window.

"I think that's the last streak," Shane said, standing and brushing his hands on his (Ilya's) jeans. He wiped a smudge from his cheek with the back of his hand. "Finally."

Ilya leaned back on his heels, surveying the room like a general inspecting a new fort. "It looks good. Not terrible for first-time painter."

Shane snorted. "You're not exactly a professional either. Remember the bookshelf incident?"

Ilya groaned dramatically. "The bookshelf was fine. It has. What is word?" Shane looked at him in amusement.

"Character?"

Ilya snapped his fingers. “Exactly.”

They laughed together, and for a moment, the room felt impossibly quiet, a bubble of home away from the chaos outside. Shane moved toward the dresser, opening drawers and arranging stacks of tiny onesies and socks, pastel stripes and little animals crinkling under his fingers.

“What about the names?” Shane asked, looking up at Ilya. “We’ve got a bit of time to decide, but… We should settle on something before the twins arrive.”

Ilya leaned against the crib, arms crossed, lips quirking. “I have mine picked already.”

Shane tilted his head. “Yeah? Enlighten me.”

Ilya’s voice softened. “Mikhail. My mother's patronymic was Mikhailovna. I don't care for my grandfather, but—” He trailed off a bit with a look of sad nostalgia before continuing. “It is good Russian name. Strong, for a boy, but also for my mom.”

Shane blinked, a little breathless at the thought Ilya had put behind his choice. “Misha, for a nickname,” Ilya added

Shane tried it on his tongue, whispering the name to himself. “I love it. It’s beautiful.”

Ilya nodded with tears pooling in his eyes. They didn’t spill over as they rarely did, but it made Shane’s chest hurt all the same. “And… the second one is up to you.”

Shane hesitated, smiling as he traced the edge of the crib. “I’ve been thinking… Megumi. In Japanese, it means "blessing." I know we haven't met them yet, but… I think both of them are a blessing to me.” Shane shrugs his shoulders. “It is usually a girl’s name, but nobody here knows Japanese anyway.”

Ilya’s eyes softened, a small smile tugging at the corner of his lips. “Megumi… I like it. It’s soft. Different from Mikhail, but fits perfectly. Your mom will like it.”

Shane grinned, his hand moving to his stomach, fingers resting over the twins’ gentle movements. “Miikail and Megumi. Misha and Gumi. I think its funny that we both picked M names without talking about it first.”

Ilya laughed and came closer to kiss Shane softly. Sucking his bottom lip with gentle force.

“You are my soulmate. Read your mind.” He winked. It made Shane blush unconsciously. What did it say about him that his husband still made him blush even after being together for 10 years? Probably that he was a loser in love.

Looking up at his alpha, who was already staring down at him, made him feel that maybe it was okay because Ilya was also a loser in love. He leaned forward and pulled Ilya’s head down to kiss him again. Breathing in the sweet air between them as they kissed. Smelled like home and safety.

Shane was quiet for a beat before saying, “I hope they like each other.”

Ilya shrugged and crouched next to him to pick up a pair of tiny socks Shane had dropped. “They will be together in ways nobody else will understand. Of course, they like each other.” Shane leaned into him, forehead resting on Ilya’s shoulder. “I hope so.”

“I always wanted my children to be close with each other and with me,” Shane whispered the last part. A sliver of self-doubt had been bleeding into his mind as they got closer to his due date.

Ilya groaned loudly and annoyingly.

“Oh my god, Shane Hollander. You need to stop reading parenting books.”

“I can’t help it! They have a lot of good information on how to deal with kids as they grow! What if they hate me?” Ilya rolled his eyes but put down the pile of bibs he was organizing to take Shane's face in his hands.

“They will love you, as I love you. They will love you because you are their mother, and you love them unconditionally.” He looked into Shane's eyes as he said the words, so he knew how serious he was.

Everyone with eyes could see how much Shane wanted to be a mom. The way he nested and organized their house. The baby shopping, the meal planning, and researching of little league teams and schools. Shane always had a five-year plan, and his babies were going to have everything they could ever need.

Ilya knew that Shane was worried, but he also knew that their sons would grow up in the most loving and supportive environment children could ask for.

—

(Author's note: When Ilya and Svetlana are talking to each other, it is almost always in Russian unless they are around Shane or Rose. Ilya is a LOT more eloquent in Russian, so he has important conversations in it when he can.)

The coffee shop is small and tucked between a florist and a bookstore, the kind of place that smells like espresso and baked sugar and feels deliberately untouched by time. Svetlana had taken him here before because she thinks the baristas are cute. Ilya chose it because it's quiet. Because no one here looks twice at him anymore. Because Svetlana likes the pistachio croissants.

She's already there when he arrives, seated by the window with her expensive purse draped over the chair and two coffees on the table, one black, one with too much milk.

"You're late," she says mildly.

"You ordered for me," Ilya replies, equally mild, pulling out the chair across from her.

"Of course I did. I know you drink rocket fuel when you're nervous."

"I'm not nervous."

She hums, unconvinced, and finally studies him properly. The line of his shoulders. The way his jaw is too tight.

"…Ilya. You don't ask to meet for coffee like this unless something is wrong."

He exhales through his nose. Typical. She's always been like this. Always reading him too well and picking apart the situation before he even opened his mouth. It was incredibly annoying, and one of the many reasons he loved her.

"I need to talk to you," he says quietly. "And I need you not to

interrupt me until I finish."

Svetlana stills immediately. Her hand tightens around her cup. Ilya can tell she has a million scenarios running in her mind like a rolodex of cards.

"That bad?"

"Nothing is really wrong," he says slowly. "It's just… important."

Svetlana's expression shifts. Serious now. Grounded. She wraps both hands around her cup, waiting. "Then talk."

Ilya stares down at the table for a moment longer than he should. His fingers curl against the smooth wood.

"You remember when we were seven," he begins, voice low, "and my father left me at the rink for four hours because he forgot?"

Svetlana's expression softens. "I remember you falling asleep on my coat."

"You stayed," he says. "Everyone else went home."

She doesn't answer. She doesn't need to.

"I didn't have men who stayed," Ilya continues. "I had men who taught me that love was conditional. That protection had a price."

His voice doesn't shake. That almost makes it worse.

"When my father died, I thought my brother would finally stop hating me. Instead, he learned how to take more."

Svetlana reaches across the table and covers his hand.

"I cut him off," Ilya says. "And I don't regret it. But it taught me something very clearly."

He looks up at her then. A fiery righteousness burning in his hazel eyes.

"I will not leave my children with people who don't know how to be kind or know the meaning of unconditional love."

Her breath catches.

“I need to ask you something,” he says. “And before you answer, I need you to know I wouldn’t ask if there was anyone else I trusted more.”

Her eyes soften, but she doesn’t interrupt. She reaches her hands forward and cups his much larger ones with long, delicate fingers.

“If something happens to me,” he says slowly. “Or to Shane. If we get hurt. If the world decides to be cruel.” His thumb curls slightly under her palm. “I don’t want my sons passed around out of obligation.”

He swallows hard. A sharp tick in his throat that he knows all too well and is even better at masking.

“I don’t want them raised by men who see them as something to control or make money off of like they did with me.”

Svetlana’s eyes shine. “Ilya…”

“I don’t want Shane’s parents to feel like they are obligated to raise children again,” Ilya says. “They’re already tired; they have given everything to Shane. They deserve peace for their hard work. And Hayden and Jackie—” He shakes his head. A small, fond huff of a laugh. “They have a small army already. I won’t put that weight on them.”

She smiles faintly through tears.

“And I don’t trust myself to choose correctly if I am left behind by Shane or I am not here at all and he has to choose,” he finishes, holding back tears. “So I’m choosing now.”

Silence stretches between them, thick and weighted.

“I had one man who should’ve protected me,” Ilya says quietly. “And he didn’t. My brother wasn’t any better. You know this. I loved him. I paid for him. And he still used me like an open wallet until I stopped letting him. My mother was the only light in my life, and she left me when I was too young.”

There it is. The old wound, spoken plainly.

She squeezes his hand. As she says softly. “You survived.”

“Because of you,” he replies without looking up. “You stayed when no one else did. Since we were babies. You were the only constant.”

Silence stretches between them, thick and tender.

You're asking me to raise your children," Svetlana says carefully.

"Yes."

"You're asking me to be their mother if you can't."

"Yes."

"I want you to be their godmother," he says at last. "I want you to be the person who raises them if we can't. I want them to grow up with someone who knows where they come from, who will love them without conditions. Someone who knows how precious they are to me and will treasure them like I would if I'm unable to."

Svetlana's breath stutters. Her eyes fill fast, betraying her before she can stop it.

"You idiot," she whispers. "You didn't even let me say yes yet."

He finally looks up. His eyes are wet, unguarded.

"You trust me with your whole world," she says, voice shaking. "Of course I'll say yes."

"You're giving me the most terrifying responsibility imaginable," she says, laughing and crying at once. "And you didn't even bring flowers."

Ilya laughed into his hand as he wiped his face. "I'll buy you a muffin."

She reaches across the table and cups his face with both hands, thumbs pressing into his cheeks like she's memorizing him.

"I would burn the world for your boys," she says fiercely. And Ilya knows he made the right choice.

His breath breaks. Hitching on a sob, he chokes back.

"They'll know where they come from," he says, voice rough. "They'll know their languages. Their history. They'll know their father loved them."

"They'll know you," Svetlana says. "Even if you're not there."

He nods, eyes wet, but unashamed at the show of emotion so publicly. It feels like a “fuck you” to his father.

“I trust you with everything,” he says simply. “There is no one else.”

They lean forward at the same time, foreheads touching across the table like they did when they were children, crying quietly into their hands and breathing the air between them. Svetlana always smells like fresh snow and lavender. It reminds him of his mother.

After a moment, Svetlana sniffs and pulls back. “You’re going to make me emotional at work now.”

“I need you to come to the baby shower,” Ilya says after a moment, wiping his face with the heel of his hand. “Two weeks. No excuses.”

Svetlana laughs wetly. “You’re ordering me now?”

“Yes. And you have to bring Rose.”

Her smile turns soft and fond at the mention of her new girlfriend. “Shane really did us a favor there.”

“I know,” Ilya says. “She makes you happy.”

Svetlana lifts her coffee in a small toast. “Then it’s settled. I’m their godmother.”

Ilya nods, relief settling deep in his chest.

Ilya lifts his cup in return.

For the first time, the future feels solid.

Not hopeful.

Certain.

—

They rent out the botanical garden because it’s quiet.

Because the glass ceilings let in light without inviting eyes. Because the air smells like damp earth and citrus blossoms instead of cameras and press badges. Because Shane wanted green, living things around

him, something growing that wasn't him.

It's late afternoon, sunlight filtering through panes overhead and scattering across white-clothed tables. Ferns and flowering vines curve around the space, softening the edges. The workers had strung warm lights through the rafters, and the hum of conversation never quite rose above a comfortable hum.

No reporters.

No phones held too high.

Just people who know them.

Shane stands near a table stacked with gifts, one hand resting automatically on his stomach as he laughs at something Hayden says. He's wearing a loose linen shirt that drapes easily over his bump, cheeks flushed and eyes bright in a way they haven't been in weeks.

"You look smug," Hayden says, eyeing him.

"I am smug," Shane replies. "I'm surrounded by plants and people I love, and nobody is yelling at me."

Jackie snorts. "Give it five minutes. Arthur's here."

As if summoned, a small blur of limbs barrels past them, Jade and Ruby chasing after him with identical shrieks of laughter. The twins are older now, tall, sharp-eyed, and already carrying themselves like they know how to be the most important people in a room. They skid to a stop near the dessert table.

"Arthur," Jade warns. "Mom said one slice."

"I didn't *eat* it yet," Arthur argues, already eyeing the cake like it personally wronged him.

Ruby crosses her arms. "You're going to knock it over."

"I'm not!"

Amber, still small enough to be cradled on Jackie's hip, babbles happily, entirely unconcerned with the looming disaster. Ilya watches all of it from Shane's side, one arm loose around his waist, amusement softening his sharp features.

"This," he says quietly, "is our future."

Shane hums. “Sticky and loud?”

“And covered in frosting.”

They don’t even hear the crash at first.

There’s a beat, a collective inhale, and then the unmistakable *thump* of a table jolting. The half-eaten sheet cake slides, tilts, and goes down in a slow, tragic collapse, taking the tablecloth and Arthur with it.

The resulting silence is loud.

Then Arthur looks up, absolutely covered in frosting, eyes wide and stunned. Ruby gasps. “Oh my god! You’re in big trouble!”

Jade bursts out laughing.

“I JUST WANTED ONE MORE,” Arthur wails, lip wobbling.

Jackie groans. “Arthur—”

But no one’s actually mad. Not really. Someone hands Arthur a napkin, not that it will do much; the boy is covered in blue frosting. Someone else snaps a photo. Amber claps like it’s the best thing she’s ever seen. Shane laughs so hard he has to brace himself against Ilya. “Oh,” he says breathlessly. “We’re so fucked.”

Ilya grins. “I cannot wait.”

Later, Shane finds himself tucked into a quieter corner near a cluster of orchids, sipping lemonade while Rose settles beside him. She’s relaxed here, hair loose, sunglasses pushed up into it.

“You look… happy,” Rose says, smiling.

Shane exhales. “I am. Today feels normal. That’s rare lately.”

“I’m glad,” she says sincerely. “You deserve boring joy.”

They sit in companionable silence for a moment before Shane glances toward Svetlana, who’s talking animatedly with Ilya, gesturing with her hands like she always does.

“She said yes,” Shane says softly.

Rose turns to him. “Of course she did.”

Shane nods, swallowing. “We talked about it before he asked. Ilya was… scared. He doesn’t talk about it much, but the idea of leaving them without someone safe—” He presses a hand to his stomach. “I couldn’t imagine anyone better.”

“She loves him,” Rose says. “She always has.”

“I know,” Shane replies. “That’s why I wanted to thank her.”

As if on cue, Svetlana approaches, a gift bag tucked under her arm. Shane stands carefully, wincing just a little.

“Don’t,” she says immediately. “Sit.”

He ignores her and hugs her anyway. “Thank you,” Shane murmurs. “For saying yes. For being there for him. For them.”

Svetlana’s eyes shine. “You don’t have to thank me. They’re family.”

She pulls back, hands resting briefly over Shane’s bump, reverent but familiar. “They’re already loved. You did that.”

Ilya watches the exchange, something soft and unguarded in his expression. When Shane returns to his side, Ilya presses a kiss to his temple.

“You okay?” he asks quietly.

Shane nods. “More than okay.”

They stand there together, surrounded by greenery and laughter and the low, constant hum of life continuing, messy and beautiful and full.

For once, nothing feels like it’s about to break.

They open gifts late, once the sun has started to dip and the garden has softened into gold.

Someone drags chairs into a loose circle near the biggest fig tree, the leaves overhead rustling gently in the evening breeze. Shane settles onto a cushioned bench with a sigh, and Ilya immediately kneels to adjust a pillow behind his lower back like it’s instinct now. No one comments on it. No one needs to. Their soft eyes at his gentle affection say everything.

“Okay,” Hayden announces, clapping his hands. “Rules: no complaining, no pretending you don’t like things, and if anyone

bought a drum set, I will find you."

JJ raises his hands defensively. "It was *educational*."

Shane laughs. "I already love it."

The first few gifts are soft and easy. Tiny sweaters. Onesies folded so small they barely seem real. Handmade blankets from Shane's mom, with David hovering nearby with that careful, overwhelmed smile he's had on and off all afternoon.

"These are ridiculous," Ilya mutters, holding up a pair of newborn skates someone gifted as a joke. "They are smaller than my hand."

"Symbolic," Marlow says. Ilya rolls his eyes. "Christmas ornament." He says instead.

Then Shane opens a long, narrow box.

Inside are two matching violins, child-sized, beautifully crafted, and made of pale wood polished to a gentle glow. A note tucked inside reads:

For whenever they're ready to be the center of attention in any arena.
— Svetlana & Rose

Shane just… stops.

His throat tightens so suddenly that it catches him off guard. He presses a hand to his stomach, grounding himself, and blinks hard.

"Oh," he breathes. "Oh my god."

Ilya's hand comes to his knee immediately. "What is it?"

Shane turns the violins so he can see them. Ilya's expression shifts. Surprise at first, then something soft and reverent. "How did you know we wanted them to play music?" Ilya asks softly while picking up one delicate instrument.

Svetlana shrugged. "You always wanted to play violin, but your dad wouldn't let you. I know what you want for your sons, Братишка."

Ilya held in the tears as he stood to hug his sister. Picking her up in a hug and spinning her in a circle as she laughed and batted at his arms. "Thank you." He whispered into her curly hair. Pressing the words into the space only they could hear.

Ilya put Svetlana down and hugged Rose, too, thanking her for the thoughtful gift. He turned around and realized Shane was crying into a tissue someone had given him.

“They aren’t even born yet,” Shane whispers, half laughing, half overwhelmed at his love for his husband and the love he has with Svetlana. “And they’re already this loved.”

Svetlana shrugs, eyes shining. “We plan ahead in this family. Children are the greatest treasure.”

Rose smiles. “Also, you cry very prettily.”

There’s laughter, but it’s gentle. Protective.

They keep going.

Hockey gear, of course. Tiny jerseys are already printed with *ROZANOV* on the back. There are books in four languages, stuffed animals, art supplies, and a ridiculously elaborate mobile from Hayden and Jackie that Arthur immediately tries to dismantle.

There are gifts for Shane as well. New clothes and nursing items. JJ even bought him a mini fridge to keep in the nursery for late-night feeding times.

By the time the pile dwindles, Shane’s cheeks are flushed, and his energy has softened into something hazy and warm.

Yuna clears her throat.

“I believe,” she says calmly, “there is one thing you haven’t shared.”

The room stills.

Shane glances at Ilya. They’d talked about this. About when. About who should say it. About how much of themselves they were willing to give, even here. Ilya squeezes his fingers once. Steady. Solid.

Shane exhales. “We wanted to wait,” he says, voice carrying easily in the quiet. “Until it felt… right.”

Everyone leans in without meaning to.

“They’re boys,” Shane continues, smiling despite himself. “Which half of the world already knew from the press conference.”

Jackie fist-pumps quietly.

“And,” Shane says, one hand settling over his stomach as the twins shift, as if they know they’re being discussed, “they have names.”

Ilya speaks then, his accent a little thicker than usual, emotion threading his words.

“Our firstborn will be Mikhail,” he says. “Misha.”

David’s breath catches audibly. Shane smiles at him, then looks back to the group. “And our second,” Shane says softly, “will be Megumi.”

There’s a beat of silence. Then Rose smiles slowly. “That’s beautiful. A name in both of your mother tongues.”

“Exactly.” Says Ilya with pride in his eyes.

“Megumi, it means blessing,” Shane explains, fingers absentmindedly tracing circles over his belly. “Grace. Something cherished.”

Svetlana presses a hand to her mouth. “They sound like they belong together,” Hayden says quietly. “Different, but—”

“—balanced,” Yuna finishes.

Ilya nods. “Exactly.”

For a moment, no one speaks. The garden hums around them with the cicadas, distant traffic, and the rustle of leaves overhead. Shane feels full in a way that has nothing to do with food. Ilya leans in, murmuring just for him, “Mikhail and Megumi.”

Shane smiles. “Misha and Gumi.”

“Our sons,” Ilya says, like he’s still testing the shape of the idea.

Shane leans into him, eyes burning pleasantly. “Yeah. Our sons.”

Later, as the light fades completely and people begin to gather their things, Shane watches Arthur toddle past with frosting still faintly crusted in his hair and Jade and Ruby arguing quietly over who gets to hold Amber next.

He looks at Ilya, heart so full it almost aches.

“We’re really doing this,” he murmurs.

Ilya presses a kiss to his temple. “We already are.”

And for once, the future doesn’t feel frightening.

It feels named.

—

Eight months in, Shane’s body started rebelling in ways that scared him. Shane was exhausted in a way that no amount of reading mom blogs had prepared him for. Anemia made his legs feel like lead and caused nausea that refused to let him keep even water down. Bloodwork came back bad; the babies were struggling.

The doctor assured them it was normal for twins to come early and to take a toll on the mother, but she still recommended they come into the hospital early.

Ilya was like watching a fox on cocaine. He was running back and forth in their house, grabbing supplies and stuffing them into their go bag. Shane felt bad, but he calmly called his mom while Ilya worried about everything else.

“Okaasan, can you meet us at the hospital? I think it's time.”

The ride to the hospital felt like a blur. Shane gripped Ilya’s hand so tightly his knuckles went white. “I’m okay,” he kept whispering, but his voice trembled. He mostly said it for Ilya; inside, he wasn’t okay. He was terrified and thrilled and completely unprepared, all at once.

Ilya, for his part, was a mess. He was white-knuckled on Shane’s hand, muttering, “Okay. Okay. We got this. We got this,” like saying it enough times would make it true. He was the strongest man Shane knew, and right now, he looked small and frightened. Human.

The hospital smelled of antiseptic and urgency. David and Yuna were there, fussing and hovering in that quiet, steady way that made Shane feel both safe and embarrassed.

“Breathe, honey,” Yuna said softly, pressing her hand to his cheek. “Everything’s going to be fine. We’re right here.”

David leaned over, adjusting Shane’s hospital gown like it was a school uniform and he had to get it perfect. “Remember, baby, the

doctors are professionals. You follow directions, and in a few hours, you'll meet your boys."

Shane swallowed, gripping both of their hands. "I just… I'm terrified. Excited too, but terrified."

And then there was Ilya.

Standing in the pre-op room, arms crossed, lips in a pout so exaggerated it could have been a cartoon, he was muttering, "I can't just… sit here. I should be in there. I should be…"

"Sir," a nurse began, annoyed at this recurring conversation. "You can't go into the surgical room—"

"I don't care! You don't understand; my mate is about to get cut open, and I'm *supposed to stay calm*?"

Shane groaned, covering his face with one hand. "Ilya… please. Just… behave. For my sanity."

Hayden, leaning casually against the wall, snorted. "You're doing a great job, Rozanov. Truly Oscar-worthy. Maybe a Golden Globe too."

Ilya shot him a glare that could freeze ice. "I am not *acting*! This is genuine panic! And if anyone touches Shane wrong, I will—"

Jackie, perched on a stool nearby, rolled her eyes. "Yeah, yeah, we get it. Big Bad Alpha. Just stop bothering the nurses."

Shane, strapped to the gurney and waiting, tried to focus on breathing. He felt every nerve alive: excitement, terror, and this overwhelming love for the tiny humans inside him. He could hear Ilya whining at the nurses like a toddler, stomping his feet, and leaning dramatically against the wall. Shane's pulse spiked, and somehow, he laughed through the fear.

"Look at him," Shane muttered to his parents, "my hockey star, turned giant baby."

"Better a giant baby than an absent husband," David said dryly.

Yuna chuckled. "He's scared, just like you. But unlike you, he's not trying to hide it."

The doors to the operating room slid open. Shane gave Ilya a shaky smile. "Don't… don't burn the place down while I'm gone, okay?"

“I can’t promise anything,” Ilya called, voice cracking as Shane was wheeled away. Jackie leaned toward Hayden. “He’s ridiculous.”

“Ridiculous and in love,” Hayden replied, wrapping an arm around his wife, grinning.

As Shane disappeared behind the doors, everything narrowed down: the babies waiting to meet him, the pounding of his own heart, and the soft, ridiculous chaos that was Ilya pacing, muttering, and glaring at anyone who dared breathe near the surgical suite.

For the first time, Shane realized something profound: the world outside didn’t matter. He just had to survive, bring the boys into it, and survive Ilya’s theatrics. Somehow, he was more excited than scared.

Shane woke to a faint beeping, the sterile smell of the hospital, and the soft pressure of sheets against his skin. His lower body felt strange, numb, and heavy, as if someone had wrapped it in lead. He blinked against the harsh overhead lights, heartbeat erratic, every nerve alive with anticipation.

“Hey, darling,” David’s voice said, gentle and steady. Shane turned his head to see his father leaning close, hand reaching up to push the sweaty hair off of Shane's forehead. “You did it. It’s over.”

Shane’s was still fuzzy. Mind trying to get back online and understand the words. “What’s over?”

Yuna was sitting on the chair next to David and reached for his hand. “Your boys are here. Perfect, healthy, tiny, and already stubborn.”

Shane’s chest rose and fell too fast. He tried to take it in, to wrap his mind around it. *Two tiny humans. Inside me. Alive. Mine.* He blinked back tears, overwhelmed. “I… Are they—are they okay?”

“They’re perfect,” Jackie said, perched on the bed rail, grinning like the cat that got the cream. “Two tiny humans, alive, kicking, and completely yours. And Ilya…”

Shane turned his head slowly, heart hammering, and there he was. Ilya. Shirtless, and collapsed in the hospital chair beside the bed opposite his parents. Two tiny, fragile boys were pressed to his chest, swaddled in yellow and green pastel blankets, fists curled, noses scrunched, and heads covered in the tiniest hats he had ever seen. Ilya was snoring softly, head tilted back against the wall, eyes fluttering closed. Shane's stomach tightened with something fierce. Love.

"Oh my god," Shane whispered, the sound trembling. "Look at them. My family."

Ilya abruptly stopped snoring and cracked his eyes open, blinking blearily. He smacked his lips, probably dry from sleeping with his mouth open. "We're napping." His voice wobbled. "Don't… touch… they are mine." He yawned before burying his face into one of the babies tiny neck.

Tears welled in Shane's eyes, laughing despite the tremor in his chest. Everything was still a bit foggy and soft around the edges, but he knew Ilya was just waiting for him to be ready. "You know, I carried them for eight months. I get a claim too."

Shane shifted, pressing a hand to his stomach. He could feel the tight pressure of bandages there, but it felt empty. Too small. He reached his other hand toward Ilya. "Come here, please. I need to hold them."

Ilya sat up, holding the babies to his chest like they were glass ornaments. "I… do not… I do not think I can stop touching them." Shane could tell he was being serious. Ilya looked terrified to let go of his sons.

"You are too big for the bed," Shane teased, brushing a curl from Ilya's forehead as he came closer. His eyes were big and sad at being separated from his mate and his sons. "We will make it work."

Ilya sighed heavily, trying to dispel the tense energy in the room, finally leaning against Shane's shoulder, one tiny human on each side. "You're sweaty but cute," Ilya said while petting Shane's hair as Shane petted the twins. Shane snorted, "You try popping out two babies with your genes. They are already huge."

Ilya laughed fondly, making the boys rouse at the sound of their father. "They weigh almost eight pounds each." Shane stared up at his husband like he was crazy. "You're saying I had sixteen pounds of baby in my body, and you were complaining about their room decorations being hard to put together?"

David laughed from the other side of the room, setting out food he had picked up for everyone.

“Shane, you were almost nine pounds when you were born. I can never argue with your mom about anything anymore.” Ilya sighed, accepting his fate. “You were a fat baby,” Ilya muttered before kissing Shane.

Shane just laughed. He felt so full of love and joy. Seeing his family gathered here to support him. The silence lasted about ten minutes before the boys decided they needed to eat immediately. Yuna came to help Shane figure out nursing and promptly cried when Shane burst into tears as his boys immediately latched on.

“Okassan, I’m doing it.” He cried, and she just nodded and draped a blanket over his chest for privacy. “I always knew you would, baby.”

Ilya watched the spectacle of nursing from the chair beside the bed as he stuffed noodles in his face. When one of the boys started fussing, Ilya said, “Tiny humans are confusing. Why you cry? You have a boob in your mouth.”

Shane laughed softly, but his ears still turned pink at his annoying husband. He carefully brushed his fingers delicately over his sons' heads. “They’re ours. Did you expect them to be easy?”

Hayden agreed quietly. “Two of the most stubborn people I’ve ever met in my life just made two alphas. It's gonna be a handful in your house.”

Yuna leaned in, pressing a kiss to Shane’s temple. “We’re so proud of you, sweetheart. And we’re here. Every step.”

For a long moment, all the chaos, all the fear, and all the exhaustion melted away. There was only Shane, Ilya, and their tiny twins. Perfect, alive, and completely theirs.

A few hours later, Shane’s parents helped him prop himself up in the hospital bed, muscles sore, hair damp from a nurse helping him wash it with a weird shampoo cap. His dad had meticulously arranged the

pillows around his hips so he wouldn't move too much.

He tried to focus on the small tray in front of him. His dad got him sushi from his favorite Japanese restaurant as a “good job” meal, but his attention kept flicking to Ilya.

After he ate and the boys were full, Ilya had taken them and collapsed in the cushioned sleeper chair beside the bed, still shirtless, with hair sticking to his forehead from exhaustion. He was too big for it. His shoulders were slightly hanging off the sides due to their width, but he didn't seem to mind. He wasn't asleep, apparently; he insisted he was just resting his eyes.

The twins were pressed against him for skin-to-skin contact while Shane recharged with food.

“Seriously,” Shane said softly, trying not to laugh, “you look like you’re going to break that chair.”

One eye cracked open, and his voice was a rough whisper. “It won't break. I’m protecting them. Do *not* touch. You will disrupt… everything.”

Shane chuckled, “I can’t even stand up right now, so I think you’re safe.” He poked his sushi with his chopsticks. “You already lost control to them anyway; I don’t even have to interfere. You’re not exactly… enforcing the alpha role right now.”

Ilya pouted, dramatic as ever, and snuggled his face deeper into the babies’ fluffy hair. “Details. *Irrelevant.* I’m still the alpha.”

Yuna was crouched beside the bed, camera in hand, trying not to disturb the scene. “Okay, okay,” she whispered. “This is perfect. You,” she pointed at Shane. “Make a peace sign; we got sushi, Ilya, babies, and snoring.” She muttered to herself as she set up the camera shot. “Hold still for two seconds. I am going to break the internet with this.”

“Break the internet?” Shane said through a mouthful of sushi, his voice muffled. “Do I even want that responsibility again?”

“You *do*,” Yuna said, grinning. “Trust me. This is going to be iconic. You look exhausted, happy, and slightly ridiculous.” She motioned to his bedhead. “Ilya looks… well, exactly how he is: gorgeous, sweaty, in love, and half-dead. Parenthood.”

Jackie and Hayden were in the corner, eating their own sushi and

trying not to laugh.

Hayden shrugged. “It’s Instagram gold. Don’t fight it, bro.”

Ilya grumbled, finally opening both eyes and glaring at Yuna. “Do I *have* to smile? Or can I just continue my parental exhaustion?”

“You look perfect,” Yuna said, snapping the picture anyway. “The babies are perfect. You’re perfect. Shane is perfect. Stop talking; you're ruining my candid shot.”

Shane made a peace sign, seaweed salad dangling from his chopsticks, eyes bright with exhaustion and joy. “Fine, fine. But if this goes viral, you’re all partially responsible for my humiliation.”

Ilya, still holding the babies close, snorted softly. Yuna ignored him and muttered, “Humiliation? This is art, Shane.”

The photo went live. Shane groaned, putting the phone down and glancing at Ilya, who had already fallen asleep again, one tiny fist curling around his thumb. “We’re doomed,” Shane whispered.

“Or legendary,” Jackie said, smirking.

“Legendary sounds better,” Hayden said, nudging his wife with an elbow.

Yuna peeked at the notifications. “Oh. We broke Instagram.”

Shane blinked. “You mean… people are…?”

“Hundreds of thousands. Likes, shares, comments… it’s a lot,” Yuna said, barely able to keep her laughter contained. Shane leaned back against the pillows, watching Ilya, the babies nestled against him, the absurdity and the perfection of it all sinking in. “I can’t believe this is real.”

Ilya mumbled in his half-sleep, his voice rough like gravel. “Neither can I… But here we are. Tiny humans… mine forever.”

For a long moment, the hospital faded into background noise: the soft hum of machines, the faint laughter of friends, and the quiet chatter of nurses. Shane was so happy.

The photo hit Shane's Instagram at 2:13 p.m. on June 12th.

It was barely staged, and that's the reason it blew up.

Shane, pale but glowing, half-propped in a hospital bed, flashing a lazy peace sign with one hand while attempting to eat sushi with the other. His hair was a mess. His smile was soft, exhausted, and real.

In the foreground: Ilya Rozanov. Stanley Cup champion. League menace. Shirtless. Dead asleep in a hospital chair, head tipped back slightly, mouth open just enough to be incriminating.

Two newborn babies were tucked against his bare chest.

The caption was simple.

yuna_m: told him to stop snoring. didn't work. 🍣✌️🍣

Within thirty seconds, the likes started climbing.

Within a minute, Shane's phone buzzed so violently it slid an inch across the tray table.

Within five, the internet lost its collective mind.

@centaursfanpage:
IS THAT ROZANOV???? SHIRTLESS???? WITH BABIES?????

@centaursupdates:
ILYA ROZANOV SHIRTLESS WITH HIS NEWBORNS THIS IS NOT A DRILL

@rinksidehoe:
I HAVE NEVER BEEN THIS UNWELL IN MY LIFE

@puckbunny911:
this man has committed WAR CRIMES on the ice and now he's doing SKIN TO SKIN????

@omegawatch:
SHANE LOOKS SO HAPPY I'M SOBBING INTO MY PILLOW

@goalsandvibes:
the PEACE SIGN??? the SUSHI??? this is cinematic

@omegafam:
SHANE LOOKS SO HAPPY 😭😭😭he wanted that sushi bad

@sportsnet:
Stanley Cup winner Ilya Rozanov welcomes twins with partner Shane Hollander, and yes, that photo is real.

@jackie_was_here:
I TOLD HIM HE'D FALL ASLEEP FIRST.

@hayden_on_ice:
@rozanov81 never beating the "softest man alive" allegations now, buddy.

Shane watched it unfold in real time, phone vibrating nonstop in his hand.

"Oh no," he murmured.

Yuna leaned over his shoulder, eyes sparkling. "Oh yes. This is beautiful."

"I think my phone is going to catch fire," Shane said faintly. "Is that… Is that a verified account?"

"Yes," Yuna said cheerfully. "And that one. And that one. I bet people have screenshotted it already."

Across the room, Ilya snored.

One baby twitched, settling deeper into the warm hollow of Ilya's collarbone. The other let out a tiny sound, more breath than cry. Ilya shifted instinctively, even asleep, arm tightening just enough to secure them both.

The comments doubled.

Tripled.

Someone quote-tweeted with a zoomed-in crop of Ilya's face.

@rozanovdefense:
he is SNORING. this is my villain origin story.

@nhlchaos:
sorry but how is this the same guy who shattered some dude's jaw last season

@babysoftalpha:
alpha instincts = nap + babies apparently

@twinswatch:
NOT HIM HOLDING BOTH BABIES LIKE HE'S AFRAID THEY'LL GET STOLEN 😭 PAPA BEAR RELAX

@goaliegirl77:
the grip?? sir unclench they are not going anywhere 😭

"People are calling you 'Papa Bear,'" Shane said quietly, half-amused, half-stunned.

Ilya cracked one eye open. "Good," he mumbled. "I will fight them."

"You're literally asleep," Shane said.

"I can fight in my dreams."

The phone buzzed again.

@nhl:
Congrats to Ilya Rozanov and Shane Hollander on the arrival of their twins 💝

@SportsNet:
This might be the softest photo you'll see all year.

@NHLMemes:
Stanley Cup ✔
Twins ✔
Passed out immediately ✔

Shane stared. "The league account commented."

Ilya groaned. "I should sue."

"You're shirtless," Shane reminded him.

"I was ambushed."

Hayden laughed from the corner. "Buddy, you're trending in three countries."

"Impossible," Ilya muttered, pressing his face into a baby's soft hat. "I am hiding."

“You’re on a million screens,” Jackie added. “Hiding failed.”

Shane leaned back against the pillows, watching the numbers climb.

Then the Shane discourse started.

@omegacentric:
SHANE JUST HAD MAJOR SURGERY AND HE’S EATING SUSHI AND SERVING FACE???

@softbutdeadly:
peace sign after a c-section is CRAZY behavior (affectionate)

@centaurswivesclub:
he looks so calm like??? i would be crying screaming throwing up

@feralforroz:
WHY IS HE HOTTER AS A MOM???? SOMEONE EXPLAIN THE SCIENCE.

@touchgrasspls:
if i see one more “he’s mommy now” tweet i’m deleting the app (lying)

@protectshane:
the way he’s looking at Ilya??? that’s love your honor

@omegafeels:
i know this is none of my business but i would die for this family

Shane scrolled exactly long enough to regret it.

“Oh,” he murmured. “Oh, that one is… not okay.”

Yuna peeked. “Which one?”

“The one calling Ilya ‘biologically programmed for naps and childcare.’”

Ilya, still half-asleep, tightened his hold on the babies and muttered, “Accurate.”

Jackie laughed. “You’re trending with the word ‘feral,’ by the way.”

Ilya frowned. “Fear is respect.”

Hayden snorted. “They’re making fan cams already.”

Shane locked his phone and set it aside, shaking his head in disbelief. “We broke hockey twitter.”

Ilya shifted, eyes still closed. “Good,” he said softly. “They can scream. I’m busy.”

One baby sighed. The other twitched closer. And somewhere online, thousands of strangers continued to lose their absolute minds over a moment that, in this room, was nothing more than warmth, exhaustion, and love.

Two babies are breathing. One exhausted hockey star is drooling slightly. The other regretted eating wasabi. Friends arguing quietly over whether the snoring was “cute” or “concerning.” And Shane, full of awe, fear, joy, and a strange, steady calm.

He turned his phone face down.

“Let them have it; they can have this one moment,” he said softly.

Ilya shifted again, eyes still closed. “They can look,” he agreed. “They can not touch.”

Shane smiled, reaching out to brush his thumb over one tiny fist, then over Ilya’s wrist.

The internet could scream.

In this room, everything was finally quiet.

Chapter End Notes

Братишка: Little Brother

Soooo what did we think? The first part of this chapter that I wrote was Ilya asking Svetlana to be the godmother because it was my biggest vision for their future. I loved writing that part so much. The rest I had to write around that scene, and it took foreeever. I love their relationship, and I think it gives the reader a more in-depth look at their relationship.

This is the last chapter, and the next one will be the epilogue. I have most of it written already, so I'll probably post around Tuesday-ish. I love the twins, and I might do a second fic of just snapshot oneshots of their lives if anyone is interested in something like that.

Lemme know in the comments!

Chapter 10: Finale

Chapter Summary

Twins throughout the years.

Chapter Notes

I said I would post this tomorrow, but it's burning a hole in my Google Doc. I actually wrote the epilogue first because I had such a vivid idea of what the boys would be like as they grew up. This is the longest chapter by far. It's almost 12,000 words, but it is set up in blocks of life events throughout their ages.

Y'all don't know this about me, but I am a twinless twin, so being able to write about twins who grew up together was actually extremely therapeutic to me because it made me wonder what it would be like if my shadow was still here. It's hard to explain the kind of magnetic feeling you live with as an identical twin. I don't feel it with my other siblings, and they don't really understand it. I tried to portray that with Megumi and Mikhail.

Anyway, let me know what you think, as always. I read every comment even if I don't respond. They make me so happy and boost my big-headed ego.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

One Year Later

By the time the twins turned one, it was painfully obvious they were conspiring against their parents. Shane, specifically.

They looked like dolls. Actual, unfair little dolls. the kind that didn't exist in real life and yet somehow did. Their cheeks were round and perpetually pink, lashes long enough to cast shadows, and mouths forever hovering between laughter and a dramatic pout. They had Shane's face almost entirely: smooth Japanese features, the same delicate nose, and the same wide, expressive eyes that communicated offense, delight, and deep contemplation in equal measure.

They had Ilya's cheekbones, though. Sharp even in infancy, giving them an elegance that felt illegal for children who still chewed on furniture.

They were identical.

Shane hated that fact. Mostly because it never bothered Ilya.

“I swear,” Shane muttered for the third time that morning, crouched on the living room rug surrounded by blocks, plush animals, and one inexplicably sticky board book, “you were Misha five seconds ago.”

The baby in his arms blinked at him solemnly, utterly unhelpful, then leaned sideways with complete confidence, pressing his forehead against the other baby’s temple like a magnet snapping into place.

The other baby made a pleased sound and immediately latched onto his brother’s sleeve.

Ilya didn’t even look up from where he was sitting cross-legged nearby, assembling a toy that had far too many parts for something meant for toddlers.

“You’re holding Gumi.”

Shane frowned. “No, I just had Gumi. This one—”

“Misha has the slightly deeper dimple on the left,” Ilya said calmly, still focused on snapping plastic gears together. “Gumi’s curls separate more at the crown. Also, Misha bites harder.”

As if summoned by accusation alone, the baby Shane *wasn’t* holding let out an indignant noise and lunged forward, tiny teeth clamping down on his brother’s sleeve with surprising determination.

“See?” Ilya added. “Misha.”

Shane stared down at the child in his arms, then at the one chewing fabric like it had personally offended him.

“You didn’t even hesitate,” Shane said faintly.

“I never hesitate,” Ilya replied, smug without looking up.

The twins, Mikhail and Megumi, were alphas.

Both of them.

It showed early, not in aggression but in certainty. They knew what they wanted, knew where they belonged, and God help anyone who tried to suggest otherwise. They didn’t cry easily, but when they did,

it was decisive. Purposeful. Strategic.

Where they belonged, apparently, was together.

Always.

If Shane picked one up, the other followed, crawling with grim determination. If one toddled into another room, the other trailed behind like a shadow stitched to his heels. If they were separated by even a baby gate, the house filled with screams so immediate and dramatic they sounded like a fire alarm.

The pediatrician had called it *normal twin attachment*.

Ilya had called it *psychological warfare*.

Shane had asked him where he learned that phrase, and Ilya had sighed heavily and thrown a book at him titled *Signs Your Alpha Child Is Manipulating You*.

“I didn’t even know this existed,” Shane had said.

“I bought three,” Ilya replied darkly.

He’d built them two cribs.

Hand-built. Solid wood. Perfect spacing. Matching mobiles. Hours of careful sanding and alignment, measuring twice, cutting once, muttering angrily in Russian the entire time.

They used one.

The first night they tried to separate them, the screaming started within seconds. Not fussing, howling. Betrayed, furious, and heartbroken wails that escalated until both babies were red-faced, shaking, and inconsolable.

Shane had cracked first.

Ilya had lasted exactly twelve more seconds.

“They screamed for forty-five minutes,” Ilya complained one evening, arms crossed, staring at the unused crib like it had personally wronged him. “Forty-five. We bought two. I built two. For what?”

Shane adjusted the baby monitor, where Misha and Gumi were currently asleep in the same crib, limbs tangled, one leg flung over the

other's stomach, and one fist curled into his brother's shirt like a lifeline.

"For decoration," Shane said mildly.

"They will never sleep apart," Ilya said flatly.

"Maybe when they're older?"

"They will claw their way across the room to touch."

Shane laughed softly, his voice fond. "They're going to get your moles eventually."

Ilya hummed, eyes still on the screen. "Good. Proof they're mine."

"They already look like you when they scowl."

"They scowl because they're alphas."

"They scowl because *you* scowl."

Ilya crouched closer to the monitor, his scowl softening despite himself, and his voice dropping unconsciously. "They protect each other."

Shane looked at him then, really looked. At the orphan who had built a family so tightly knit it refused to be separated. At the man who learned safety through proximity, through vigilance, through love that never let go.

"They're Velcro babies," Shane said gently.

On the screen, Gumi shifted in his sleep, a soft whine leaving his mouth. Misha immediately rolled closer, pressing his forehead against his brother's, small fist tightening impossibly around fabric.

The sound stopped.

Ilya exhaled, something deep in his chest easing.

"See?" he said quietly. "Told you. One crib."

Shane smiled, tired, amused, and so deeply in love it hurt. And for the first time, the future didn't feel uncertain.

It felt full.

They learn to walk in the kitchen.

Not intentionally, Shane had envisioned a calm moment in the living room, maybe with pillows, maybe with a camera ready, but the twins have never cared about his plans.

Misha lets go of the cabinet first.

He stands there for a full three seconds, wobbling slightly, brow furrowed in deep concentration like he's considering the consequences of free will. Gumi watches him from the floor, sitting very still, eyes wide and serious.

"Misha," Shane says softly, crouched a few feet away with his arms open. "Come here, sweetheart."

Misha takes one step.

Then another.

Then trips over absolutely nothing.

Shane gasps, already lunging, but Misha catches himself on pure spite and determination, feet slapping against tile as he stumbles forward and collapses safely into Shane's arms. Shane laughs, breathless and teary all at once. "You did it. You walked. Oh my god, you *walked*."

Ilya appears in the doorway just in time to see Gumi scramble upright, dragging himself to his feet with the counter.

"No," Ilya says immediately. "No, wait for me—"

Too late.

Gumi toddles forward with far less caution and significantly more confidence, arms out like he's challenging gravity directly. He makes it halfway before wobbling and plopping down on his diapered butt, blinking in affront.

Misha turns back immediately, toddling over to him with a distressed noise.

"He's fine, baby." Shane murmurs, heart melting as Misha presses his forehead to Gumi's.

Ilya rubs his face with both hands. “We’re done. They walk now. This is the end.”

Two days later, Shane is in the living room folding laundry when the next milestone happens.

Misha drops a toy and it rolls under the couch. Misha stares at it for a long moment, clearly weighing his options. Then, very clearly, very confidently, he says:

“Fuck.”

The room goes dead silent. Shane freezes, undies halfway folded. His head snaps up so fast he nearly gives himself whiplash.

“—What did you say?”

Misha beams. Proud. Triumphant. Like he’s just discovered language and chosen violence.

“Fuck,” he repeats.

From the kitchen, Ilya mutters, “Ah.”

Shane turns slowly. Dangerously. “Ilya.”

“I don’t say it *that* much.”

Shane points at the baby. “Your son just swore before he said Mama.”

Misha toddles over, pats Shane’s knee, and says it again. “Fuck.”

Ilya kneels beside them, trying, and failing, to look repentant. “In my defense, it is a very versatile word.”

Shane buries his face in his hands. “We’re doomed.”

Gumi watches this entire exchange with intense focus, like he’s taking notes.

His first word comes a week later. Shane is on the couch, exhausted, scrolling mindlessly on his phone, when he hears it.

“O…reo.”

He blinks. Slowly lowers his phone. “Oreo?” he repeats carefully.

Gumi lights up like he's just been understood on a cosmic level. "Oreo," he says again, reaching out insistently, making grabby hands in the air.

Shane laughs, a soft, disbelieving sound. "Oh my god."

Ilya looks up from the floor. "What?"

"He said Oreo."

Ilya squints at Gumi. "That was not one of our approved words."

Shane presses a hand to his mouth, eyes shining. "That's it. That's why. That's why I couldn't stop eating them when I was pregnant."

Ilya snorts. "You ate Oreos every day for six months."

"Because *he* wanted them," Shane insists, pointing accusingly at Gumi. "You owe me an apology."

Gumi claps, delighted by the attention.

Misha toddles over and immediately tries to steal the imaginary Oreo.

"Fuck," he says when he fails.

Ilya sighs, already resigned. "I'll start censoring myself."

Shane looks at his two sons, one swearing and one craving cookies, and laughs until his sides hurt.

They walk.

They talk.

They ruin everything beautifully.

And somehow, Shane has never felt more at home.

Three Years Old

By three, it was obvious the boys had been born for the rink.

The skating camp smelled like cold air, rubber mats, and coffee that had been reheated one too many times. The ice was freshly cut,

smooth, and blinding under the lights. Tiny skates clicked against concrete as toddlers waddled toward the boards, helmets crooked, knees bent, and balance optional.

Mikhail and Megumi moved as a unit.

Matching black helmets but with different stickers on them for the instructors' sake (dinosaurs for Misha, sharks for Gumi). Matching curls peeking out from underneath. Matching hazel eyes, sharp and curious. They looked like Shane in miniature, with a soft spattering of freckles over their noses and dragon eyes softened by toddler roundness. But the curls and the stubborn set of their mouths were all Ilya.

“Hold hands,” Shane said gently, crouched in front of them to adjust straps and pads he’d already checked twice.

They already were.

Misha’s fingers were wrapped around Gumi’s sleeve; Gumi’s shoulder pressed into Misha’s. They nodded solemnly anyway, as if indulging him.

Ilya stood at the boards, arms crossed, jaw tight, not with nerves, but with focus. He wasn’t wearing Centaurs colors anymore. No logo. No number. Just a plain black jacket and worn jeans. He kept the skates, though.

Retired. The word still felt strange, even three years later.

He had walked away at the height of his career. Stanley Cup champion. League menace. Iron fist. He’d hung up his jersey without ceremony and never looked back. People complained, of course; they said he was crazy for leaving at such a pivotal part of his career. He was only 27!

That didn't matter though. Ilya played hockey because he was good at it and he had nothing else going for him. Now he had his boys and a mate.

Shane had gone back to playing six months after the twins were born.

They’d never said it out loud, but it worked. Shane needed the ice like oxygen. Ilya needed the boys like gravity.

“Okay,” the instructor chirped. “Little steps. We shuffle, not run.”

Misha took one step onto the ice. Gumi followed immediately.

They wobbled.

They steadied.

They didn't cry.

Ilya's chest tightened painfully.

"Look at them," Shane murmured, soft and proud.

"They're alphas," Ilya said, automatically.

Shane smirked. "They're three."

"They're still alphas."

"And their ability has nothing to do with having two hockey dads?" Shane teased.

Ilya rolled his eyes. "Oh my goood, Hollander, skating is *not* genetic."

The boys pushed off together. Not gracefully, not fast. They were slow and clumsy but determined. When Megumi slipped, Misha dropped with him, landing on his padded butt without complaint. When Misha tried again, Gumi grabbed his arm and hauled him upright like it was the most natural thing in the world.

"Velcro," Shane whispered.

Ilya swallowed. He skated onto the ice a few minutes later, helmetless, steady, and patient. The ice still loved him. His balance was instinctive and effortless. He crouched down in front of them, arms open. "Okay," he said softly. "Come to me."

They crashed into Ilya's legs, laughing, gripping his pants like he might disappear if they didn't hold on. Ilya laughed, low, warm, and real. He bent, scooping both boys up at once, skates cutting clean arcs into the ice. "That's my boys," he murmured.

From the stands, Shane watched with something like reverence.

Ilya had been terrifying on the ice once. Now he was gentle. Patient. He retired not because his body failed him, but because his heart chose something else. The boys pressed their foreheads together, babbling excitedly, curls damp with sweat, eyes bright.

Their first hockey fight happened six weeks later.

It was barely organized hockey, more like guided chaos, but it still mattered.

Another toddler knocked Gumi over. Not maliciously. Just clumsy. But Gumi hit the ice hard, helmet thunking against the surface.

Misha froze. Then he *snapped*. He skated, wobbled, really, straight into the other kid and shoved him with both mittens, yelling something that sounded like, “HEY!”

The kid shoved back. Misha dropped his stick. Gumi was already up. Together, they charged. It was less a fight and more two angry marshmallows colliding, but the ref blew the whistle anyway.

Parents gasped. The instructor rushed over. Shane’s hands flew to his mouth. “Oh my god.”

Ilya’s mouth twitched.

“Mikhail,” Shane hissed, horrified.

“They defended each other,” Ilya said calmly. “Correct response.”

“They’re *three*.”

“They understood assignment.”

Both boys were removed from the ice, furious and indignant, yelling in overlapping toddler rage. When Shane knelt to calm them, they clung to each other immediately, foreheads pressed together, still vibrating with offense.

“He pushed Gumi,” Misha said, voice shaking.

“I fell,” Gumi added, tearful but outraged.

Shane hugged them both. “I know. I know.”

Ilya crouched in front of them, serious. “Next time,” he said evenly, “you stay on your skates.” They nodded solemnly.

Suspended for five minutes.

Ilya called it “their first penalty.” He had never been so proud.

Their first win came shortly after.

A tiny scrimmage. No standings. No trophies worth mentioning. Just a scoreboard that barely worked and parents yelling too loud.

The twins were on the ice together. As always. They didn’t score the first goal, but they did a great job assisting it.

Misha stole the puck along the boards. Gumi was already moving, already where the puck would be. Misha passed without looking.

Megumi tapped it in.

Goal!

The rink erupted.

The boys collided into each other like magnets, helmets clunking together, laughter crackling through the cage. Shane felt something break open in his chest.

“They did it,” he whispered.

Ilya nodded once, eyes bright. “Of course they did. I’m their father.” Shane rolled his eyes.

They won by one point. At the buzzer, the boys dropped their sticks and skated as fast as their little legs allowed, straight into the glass where Shane and Ilya waited.

“We won!” Gumi shouted.

“I passed!” Misha added, breathless.

Ilya crouched and bumped their helmets together gently. “Perfect chemistry, щенки.” Shane hugged them both, inhaling cold air and sweat and something impossibly precious. “I’m so proud of you.”

They leaned into each other instinctively, small arms tangled, still Velcro, still fearless.

Three years old.

Already skaters. Already teammates.

Already each other's whole world.

And always, unmistakably, their sons.

Seven Years Old

Seven felt too old.

Shane realized it one morning standing in the doorway of the boys' bedroom, watching them get dressed without help. Uniform shirts buttoned neatly. Socks paired correctly. Shoes tied with only minimal grumbling and no requests for assistance.

They didn't need him hovering anymore.

Mikhail and Megumi sat side by side on the edge of the bed, knees bumping, curls still wild from sleep. They murmured to each other in soft, quick, efficient French, arguing about whose turn it was to do chores.

"I cleaned it yesterday," Gumi said, switching seamlessly to Japanese.

"I cleaned the bathroom!" Misha replied in Russian, scowling.

"Compromise," Shane said weakly from the doorway, still in his pajamas, coffee untouched in his hand.

They both turned, instantly attentive.

"Yes, Mama," they chorused in English.

Shane pressed his lips together and blinked hard.

Seven, he thought. *They're only seven.*

By seven, the twins were still inseparable.

The difference was that now, the world had started noticing.

They attended a private French elementary school tucked into a quiet neighborhood, the kind with ivy on the walls and uniforms that somehow never stayed clean. Mikhail and Megumi walked through the gates every morning with identical backpacks and identical

expressions of mild seriousness, fingers hooked together out of habit rather than need.

The teachers had tried to separate them.

“It’s important for twins to develop independently,” one had said delicately during a parent-teacher conference. “To avoid hyperdependence.”

Ilya had laughed at the teacher and told them good luck with that.

The separation lasted exactly one week before Shane opened a letter that Gumi gave him after school that said he would be moving into the other class. He should have probably asked what he did to get transferred, but he was Ilya's son, and some things were better left unanswered.

“They function better as a unit,” one teacher had said delicately during a follow-up conference. *“Think of them as… complementary.”*

Shane had laughed.

Ilya had nodded, vindicated. He’d said that from the beginning.

The teachers at school had stopped calling them “the twins” and started calling them “les garçons brillants.” They were top of the class, not in the loud way, but in the way teachers spoke about them with softened voices and careful respect.

Misha thrived in science. He loved experiments, systems, and logic. Anything that could be taken apart, categorized, tested, or measured fascinated him. He built structures out of toothpicks and glue that actually held weight. He asked questions that started with *“What would happen if”* and ended with teachers promising to “look into it.”

Gumi lived in art and literature. He devoured books far beyond his grade level, switching between French, English, Russian, and Japanese with unnerving ease. His essays read like small stories. His drawings felt deliberate, emotional, and intimate. He wrote poems in the margins of his notebooks, sometimes in French, sometimes in Japanese.

Together, they were fluent in four languages: French at school, English at home, Japanese with Shane, and Russian with Ilya. They switched effortlessly, unconsciously, often within the same conversation.

“I don’t even remember teaching them this,” Shane whispered once, watching them chatter animatedly with classmates’ parents in flawless French.

Ilya watched them too, jaw tight. “I remember,” he said quietly. “I was listening.”

They still did everything together.

Including violin.

The decision had been mutual, immediate, and non-negotiable.

If one played, so did the other. Their aunt Svetlana was their number one supporter.

They played violin together because separation had never been an option.

The first recital had nearly killed Shane from nerves. Two identical boys on stage, tiny violins tucked under their chins, curls barely tamed, bowing in perfect synchronicity. Misha counted under his breath. Gumi leaned into the music, eyes half-closed. They breathed together. Bowed together. Finished together.

The applause had been thunderous.

Shane had cried.

He hadn’t even tried to hide it.

“You realize they’re showing off,” Rose whispered.

“They’re seven,” Shane whispered back.

“They’re showing off.”

The ice cream was non-negotiable.

Shane barely made it out of the recital hall before Rose was already declaring, “They earned sugar. I don’t care what time it is.”

Svetlana nodded in full agreement. “They were perfect. I am emotionally compromised.”

The boys walked between them down the sidewalk, still in concert clothes. Pressed button-ups half untucked, curls escaping the careful styling that Shane had slaved over with a comb and a bucket of gel, violin cases slung over their shoulders like badges of honor.

“I didn’t mess up the second shift,” Misha said, anxious even now.

“You didn’t,” Shane said immediately. “You were perfect.”

Gumi hummed happily, swinging their joined hands. “The echo was good tonight.”

“It *was*,” Rose agreed. “Very atmospheric. Very ‘child prodigy in an indie film.’”

They ended up at a little place with chipped tables and neon lights buzzing faintly overhead. The boys took forever deciding.

“I want chocolate,” Misha said.

“I want vanilla,” Gumi countered.

“You *always* want vanilla.”

“And you *always* want chocolate.”

Svetlana leaned down conspiratorially. “You could… share.”

They stared at her like she’d suggested separating them permanently.

“No, thank you,” they said together. Ever polite, but serious in a way only seven-year-olds can be.

They compromised, eventually, on cookies and cream for Gumi and chocolate for Misha, sitting pressed hip to hip in the booth, legs tangled under the table.

Ilya watched them quietly, one arm slung along the back of the booth behind Shane. His eyes were soft in a way they rarely were in public.

“You know,” Rose said, stirring her spoon idly, “most kids need incentives to be close to their siblings. I know I did.”

“They don’t,” Shane said, watching the boys lean together to compare bites. “They just… like doing things together.”

“They like *being* together,” Svetlana corrected gently.

Misha smeared a bit of ice cream on Gumi's nose without warning.

Gumi gasped. "Misha!"

Shane laughed, reaching for a napkin. "Absolutely not—"

Too late. Gumi retaliated, laughing wildly as he dabbed chocolate onto Misha's cheek.

The booth dissolved into giggles and sticky fingers. Shane giving up entirely on keeping their clothes clean. Ilya snapping a photo when he thought no one noticed.

Later, walking home with bellies full and violins bumping against small knees, Misha slipped his hand into Shane's.

"Did we do good?" he asked quietly.

Shane squeezed back. "You were amazing, baby."

Gumi reached for Ilya's coat, fingers curling into the fabric. "Next time," he said thoughtfully, "I want to play something sad."

Ilya nodded. "We can pick something together." Megumi smiled up at his dad with stars in his eyes and a missing tooth in his mouth, like he was just given a gift.

They walked on like that, sugar-slowed, music still humming in their bones, flanked by people who loved them fiercely.

Seven years old.

Bowing on stage. Sticky with ice cream and joy.

Hockey, however, was where they felt most alive.

Hockey was still the center of their gravity.

They were on a club team now. Real practices, real drills, real expectations. Real strong coffee for Ilya because he had to take them at 5 am every morning.

They were good. *Very* good. Their skating was clean and controlled. Their awareness on the ice was uncanny. They played on the same line often, moving like they shared a nervous system. They passed

without looking. Anticipated each other's cuts. Covered each other without discussion.

The coaches stopped questioning it.

"Let them cook," one had said, shaking his head in awe.

"Are they psychic?" one of the newer coaches had asked.

"No," Ilya replied calmly. "They're Velcro babies. It's in their DNA."

From the stands, Shane watched them with a tight chest, pride burning low and steady. They were gliding across the ice like they were made for it, smaller than the other kids but sharper and faster in their thinking. When Megumi fell, Misha was there before the whistle. When Misha got pinned along the boards, Megumi peeled the puck free without hesitation.

Goal.

The first real fight happened on a Tuesday.

It wasn't dramatic at first. No gloves dropped, no cinematic pause. Just a shove that lingered a second too long after the whistle.

Misha had been pinned along the boards, shoulder pressed hard enough that the breath left his lungs in a startled *oof*. The other kid was bigger. Older by months, maybe a year. Confident in the way kids sometimes are when they realize referees don't always see everything.

Megumi saw it.

He didn't think. He never did when it came to Misha.

The shove came fast and low, a clean hit straight into the kid's chest. Not enough to injure, but definitely enough to *mean* something. The kid stumbled back, surprised more than hurt, and then swung.

The rink erupted.

"Hey—HEY!" the coach shouted.

Misha reacted on instinct. He dropped his stick and lunged forward, gloves still on, helmet rattling as he grabbed the front of the other kid's jersey and yanked him away from Gumi. It was clumsy and

uncoordinated and extremely seven years old, all elbows and indignation, but it was *fierce*.

The ref blew the whistle, long and shrill. Parents stood. Gasps rippled through the stands. Shane was already on his feet, heart in his throat. Ilya didn't move. His jaw tightened, eyes sharp and assessing, not angry. Focused.

The boys were separated quickly. No punches landed. No blood. Just two red-faced kids vibrating with adrenaline and outrage, shouting things that barely made sense. "He pushed him first!" Megumi yelled.

"He didn't say sorry!" Misha added, pointing like that settled it.

Both were sent to the penalty box. Together. Of course. They sat side by side, legs swinging, still bristling. Misha leaned into Gumi's shoulder, muttering furiously in Russian. Gumi responded in Japanese, nodding along like he was taking notes.

"What are they saying?" Shane whispered.

Ilya's mouth twitched. "Nothing useful."

When the game ended, their team still won, and the coach pulled Shane and Ilya aside, rubbing the bridge of his nose.

"Technically," he said carefully, "they did nothing wrong."

Shane sagged with relief.

"But," the coach continued, "they *don't* need to police the ice. Pushing is part of the game. It's a contact sport."

Ilya shrugged once in the sarcastic way he used to do while pro, and people questioned his checks. "They protect each other. I won't punish them for that."

The coach hesitated. Then sighed. "Yeah. I can understand that, knowing your reputation." He smirked at Ilya. "But just talk to them about on-ice conduct, please."

In the locker room later, Shane knelt in front of them, voice firm but gentle. "Look, I know you don't like when people touch one of you, but it happens in hockey. You guys can't fight everyone who pushes your brother. Even if you think they deserved it."

Misha's lip trembled. "He hurt Gumi."

Gumi shook his head quickly. “It didn’t hurt. I just didn’t like it.”

Shane cupped both their faces. “I know. But use your words. You can yell all you want on the ice as long as it’s civil.”

Ilya interrupted Shane to add, “Don’t swing. That costs penalty time. Then who will make goals?”

They nodded solemnly, more upset about losing than hurting other kids. Shane rolled his eyes. Alphas.

Ilya crouched then too, meeting their eyes. “You did not lose control,” he said quietly. “But next time, you use your words first, yes?”

Misha sniffed. “Okay.”

Gumi added, immediately, “But if he does it again—”

“No,” both dads said at once.

The boys exchanged a look. "Worth it," that look said.

They left the boys to get showered and dressed and waited in the hall outside of the locker room. Shane exhaled shakily. “They’re growing too fast,” he said, voice breaking. “They don’t need us the same way, and they are both turning into demons on the ice.”

Ilya didn’t look away from the door. “They still look for us first after a win or a fight. They are hot-headed alphas. Of course they fight, Shane.”

Shane swallowed.

“They’re alphas,” Ilya added, softer now. “But they’re still ours.”

The boys came out ten minutes later and handed their dad the hefty hockey bags. As Ilya leaned down to pick them up, he whispered, “Don’t fight if your mom can see,” to the boys before easily slinging the bags over his shoulder and heading down the hallway.

The twins both giggled and took one of Shane's hands each. He looked at all three of them suspiciously, but he decided that ignorance was bliss.

Twelve Years Old

Middle school changed things.

Not all at once. Not dramatically. Just enough that Shane started noticing the quiet shifts. The way the boys came home more tired, the way their laughter dulled around the edges, and the way the world had started to look at them instead of past them.

It crept in quietly, wearing blazers and polished shoes and expectations no one bothered to explain to children who had never learned how to be anything but *together*.

The private middle school was bigger than their last one. Longer hallways. More voices. More eyes. Less patience for softness.

Shane noticed the change in increments. They were still at the top of their class. Still terrifyingly fluent in four languages. Still playing violin and hockey. Still skating circles around boys twice their size. But now there were lockers. And hallways. And kids who noticed differences and decided they were weaknesses.

It started with Megumi.

Megumi stopped humming while he packed his bag in the mornings. Misha started walking half a step behind instead of beside him, close enough to shield without making it obvious. Their conversations shifted. Still fluid between French, Japanese, Russian, and English, but now, it more often dropped into Japanese when emotions ran close to the surface.

Privacy. Protection.

Megumi still drew. Constantly. Ilya had built a new bookshelf in his room specifically for all of his sketchbooks.

He couldn't stop, not really. His notebooks filled themselves. Pencil smudges lived permanently under his fingernails. Faces emerged from margins without permission. They were expressive, delicate, and alive. He sang in choir because music had always been where his feelings went when words failed.

And kids noticed.

The choir room smelled like dust and old sheet music.

Megumi stood near the back because he was now taller than most of the girls; he held his shoulders tight, eyes fixed on the conductor. He sang perfectly. Pitch true. Breath controlled. His voice was clear and bright in a way that made people turn before they meant to.

That was the problem.

“Why do you sing like that?” someone whispered during warmups.

Another boy snorted. “Sounds fake.”

After rehearsal, as chairs scraped and voices rose, someone leaned close enough for Megumi to smell their pheromones. Megumi wrinkled his nose unconsciously.

“Do you do art too?” the boy asked casually. “Figures.”

Megumi froze.

“I saw your drawings,” another added. “That stuff’s weird.”

“You should sing something else,” a third voice chimed in. “Something less… you know, gay.”

Megumi didn’t respond. He packed up silently, fingers shaking just enough that he had to start over twice when he closed his folder. In the hallway afterward, he switched to Japanese when Misha asked how practice went.

It was fine.

Misha knew that tone. He didn’t push. He just walked closer.

The comments followed Megumi everywhere after that.

“You gonna draw us a picture, Megumi?”

“Why do you sing like that?”

The jokes sharpened.

“Why do you draw all the time? Are you a loser or something?”

“Your voice sounds weird. Like a girl.”

“That’s kinda gay, isn’t it?”

Megumi ignored them. Learned to tuck his sketchbook deeper into his bag. He didn't tell their parents He didn't even tell Misha. But Misha watched. He always did.

He noticed the way Megumi's shoulders curled inward in hallways. The way his voice softened into nothing when English got cruel, but his Japanese stayed steady because only Misha and his mom understood him. The way he switched to Russian under his breath when he was angry. Using the language as armor.

The way he stopped singing around the house unless Shane asked about his pretty voice.

So when it happened, it didn't feel sudden to Misha.

Three boys by the lockers. Laughter pitched wrong, mocking, cruel. One of them tugged Megumi's bag open, flipping through pages.

"Whoa, what is this?"

"Are these supposed to be us?"

"Sing something for us, choir boy."

The sound of paper tearing echoed in his ears as he watched tears build in his little brother's eyes.

Misha snapped.

There wasn't a warning. There wasn't a threat. It was fast and ugly and nothing like hockey. No rules. No lines. No whistle. Just fury detonating in his chest, every instinct screaming *protect*.

Misha's fist connecting with a nose, then a jaw, then another jaw. A blur of motion as he swung a bigger boy over his shoulder and slammed him into the ground on his back. It all happened on instinct and fury. Blood on knuckles. The distant sound of a teacher yelling his name.

By the time a teacher pulled him off, one boy was crying, one was bleeding, and one was curled on the floor wheezing. Misha stood there shaking, breath coming too fast, eyes locked on Megumi like the rest of the world had vanished.

Megumi was pale.

Unhurt but terrified.

Misha didn't struggle when the teacher grabbed his arm and dragged him away; he just stared at his brother and told him in Japanese to go hide until he got out or their parents got there.

He just stood there, shaking, eyes locked on Misha as he was taken away from him.

He waited until they were out of sight before he ran.

The phone call came while Shane was making coffee before heading to the rink. He was retired from playing now, but he still worked as a coach.

He knew something was wrong the moment the administrator said *"your son"* instead of *"your sons."*

"Your son has been suspended," the administrator said carefully. *"Mikhail was involved in a physical altercation."*

Shane felt the floor tilt.

By the time Shane and Ilya arrived, Misha was sitting stiffly in an office chair, hands folded, jaw set so tight it ached. There was dried blood on his knuckles.

Megumi wasn't there. Not in class. Not in the nurse's office.

Gone.

They tracked his phone outside a bakery two blocks away, sitting on a cold metal bench with his knees pulled up and his sketchbook clutched to his chest like a life raft.

"I couldn't stay," he said quietly when Shane knelt in front of him. "They told me to go back to class. Misha wasn't there."

Ilya felt something fracture in his chest. He closed his eyes and nodded his understanding. He took Megumi's hand and walked back to the school. The disciplinary meeting was polite. Clinical. Carefully neutral. Words like *"altercation," "zero tolerance*," and "appropriate consequences" were used. Misha stared at the table. Megumi sat rigid beside him, hands folded in his lap.

"We recommend time apart," the headmaster said gently. "For their development."

Megumi stood. Everyone froze. “I’m leaving,” he said calmly.

Shane’s breath caught. “Gumi—”

“I’m not staying if Misha isn’t here,” Megumi said. His voice shook but didn’t break. “You can suspend him. You can punish him. But I’m not going back to class without him.”

The room tried to argue. Megumi didn’t listen. He walked out.

Misha followed without hesitation.

That night, they sat on the couch exactly like they had as toddlers. Pressed together. Knees touching. Fingers interlaced without thought.

“I’m not sorry,” Misha said finally. “They touched his art.”

Shane swallowed. “We understand why you were angry.”

“But you can’t hurt people like that,” he added softly. “The world doesn’t let you.”

Misha looked up, eyes bright and dangerous. “Then the world shouldn’t touch him.”

Megumi leaned into his brother, face pressed into his neck. “I don’t want to be alone,” he said quietly. “I don’t care if I get in trouble.”

That scared Shane more than the fight.

Later, after the boys fell asleep curled together in one bed, Ilya stood in the hallway listening to them whisper in Russian. Talking about running away. About protection. About never being separated.

Shane sat at the kitchen table, hands wrapped around a cold mug. “This isn’t healthy,” he whispered. “They don’t know how to exist apart.”

Ilya leaned against the counter. “They were born together. The world never made space for them to be separate.”

“That doesn’t mean it won’t demand it.”

The silence was heavy. “If someone hurts Megumi,” Ilya said finally, voice rough, “Misha will burn the world down.”

“And if Misha says jump,” Shane said, eyes wet, “Megumi will say how high.”

They sat with that truth between them.

Twelve years old.

Still brilliant. Still kind. Still Velcro. Only now, the world had teeth. And their love was sharp enough to draw blood.

Sixteen Years Old

By sixteen, everything hurt in quiet ways.

The kind of hurt that didn’t bleed or bruise but sat under the skin, constant and irritating, like a too-tight jersey you couldn’t take off.

They were still “the twins” to everyone else, especially since nobody except their parents could tell them apart at first glance. Still inseparable enough that teachers paired them without asking, and classmates invited one assuming the other would come too. The separation was subtle enough that most people missed it. Therapy had stretched the cord between them, not cut it.

They still walked to school together. Still sat close. Still shared glances that carried entire conversations. They still shared a room, not because their parents forced it, but because neither had ever asked to change it. Even though their dad complained all the time that he built all of their furniture and they are always in one or the other's room.

They were still a package deal.

Just… looser.

They were dating now, which only made things worse and more complicated.

Megumi’s boyfriend smelled like paint and dust and auditorium wood. He was a pretty omega who laughed easily, touched Megumi’s arm when he spoke, and leaned close in ways that made Misha’s jaw tighten until it hurt.

Misha had gone through a rotating cast of admirers: girls, omegas, and the occasional beta who thought they might have a chance with the

star center of the hockey team. Misha's girlfriend: current, temporary, replaceable, wore his jacket, laughed too loudly. She acted like she belonged in his space and there was no space for anyone else, including Megumi.

They tried to tell themselves that this was normal.

They tried to be happy for each other.

They weren't. They hated it.

Not because they didn't want each other to be happy, but because watching someone else take up space beside their twin felt like suffocation.

The overwhelming jealousy didn't feel romantic. It felt territorial. Ugly. *Embarrassing.*

They weren't supposed to be there.

Megumi knew it the moment they stepped inside. The house pulsed with noise, bass vibrating through the soles of his shoes, voices layered on top of each other in a way that made his head ache. Someone had turned all the lights low except for a string of warm bulbs slung across the living room, like it was supposed to feel intimate instead of crowded.

It smelled like spilled beer, citrus cleaner, and sweat.

Misha's hand closed around his wrist as soon as the door shut behind them. Not tight. Just there. A silent anchor to reality.

"You okay?" Misha asked, leaning close so Megumi could hear him.

Megumi nodded even though his chest felt too tight. "Yeah."

They moved deeper into the room together, shoulders brushing, instinctively keeping each other in sight. Kids from school blurred past them. Laughter spiked too loud. Someone shouted Misha's name from across the room and slapped him on the shoulder hard enough to jolt him forward.

"Holy shit, Mikhail's here!"

A cup appeared in Misha's hand before he could refuse it. He stared at

it for a second, then passed it to someone else without drinking.

Megumi hovered at his side, fingers twisting in the loose thread of his ripped jeans. He felt visible in the wrong way. Too quiet. Too careful. He watched bodies press close, watched hands on hips and shoulders and necks, and watched how easily everyone else seemed to take up space like it belonged to them.

“This was a bad idea,” Megumi murmured.

Misha shook his head. “Just give it a minute.”

They found a spot near the wall where the music was slightly less punishing. Megumi leaned back against it, grounding himself in the cool plaster. Misha stood in front of him, back half-turned like a shield without realizing it.

Someone brushed past Megumi and lingered. Too close. A hand bumped his elbow. Another glance lingered on his face.

“You’re in choir, right?” a boy asked, smirking. “You sing.”

Megumi’s stomach twisted. “Yeah.”

“That’s kinda cool,” the boy said, his tone saying the opposite. “You should sing something.”

Misha shifted instantly. “He’s not a jukebox.”

The boy scoffed, “What are you, your brother’s keeper?”

Misha growled and bared his teeth, making the other boy stumble away drunkenly.

Megumi exhaled slowly. “You didn’t have to do that.”

“Yes, I did.”

The music swelled. The room felt smaller. Megumi’s senses overloaded one by one. Too loud. Too many eyes. Too many bodies. He caught himself counting the beats of the song just to stay steady.

Then Misha’s girlfriend arrived.

She slid through the crowd like a snake, confident and smiling. Her hair was perfect in a way that reminded him of their aunt Rose and how she spent hours to get it to look like she just rolled out of bed.

Her eyes lit up when she spotted Misha.

“There you are,” she said, looping her arm around his waist. “You disappeared after practice.”

Misha stiffened. Just a fraction. Enough that Megumi noticed.

“I told you I was busy,” Misha said, not unkindly, but like he was tired of this conversation already.

Her gaze flicked to Megumi. Calculating. “Didn’t realize this was going to be a twin thing.”

Megumi’s throat went tight. He smiled anyway. Polite. Automatic.

“Hey,” he said.

She smiled back, sharp at the edges. “Hey.”

Her hand stayed on Misha’s side. Possessive. Familiar. Megumi felt it like pressure in his chest, like someone had reached in and rearranged something vital.

“I’m gonna grab air,” Megumi said suddenly.

Misha turned. “What?”

“I’ll be outside.”

He didn’t wait for an answer.

The back door was propped open. Cold night air hit him like relief. Megumi stepped out into the backyard and leaned against the brick wall, breathing hard. The music dulled to a distant thump. His hands shook, so he shoved them into his jacket pockets.

He hated this feeling. Hated how jealous he got. He hated how small he felt next to Misha’s easy gravity. Hated that he’d wanted to come just to prove he could and now wanted nothing more than to go home.

Footsteps crunched behind him.

Misha stepped out and closed the door carefully.

They stood there without speaking for a moment. The cold crept through their shoes. Streetlight spilled over them in pale yellow.

“You left,” Misha said quietly.

Megumi shrugged. “Didn’t feel like interrupting.”

Misha ran a hand through his hair. “I didn’t invite her.”

“I know.”

“I didn’t want her here.”

Megumi looked up then. Their eyes met.

“Why does it feel like I don’t belong near you when she’s around?” Megumi asked, voice barely above a whisper.

Misha swallowed. “Because I’m bad at boundaries, and she heavy-footed across them.”

That surprised a laugh out of him. Short. Unsteady.

“Yeah,” Megumi said. “You are.”

They stood shoulder to shoulder now, close but not touching. The space between them felt charged.

“I don’t like parties,” Megumi admitted. “I don’t like feeling like I have to compete just to exist.”

Misha nodded. “I don’t like who I am at them. Who people expect me to be.”

Megumi bumped his shoulder lightly. “Then why did we come?”

Misha’s mouth tilted. “Because everyone else made it sound like we were missing something.”

Megumi huffed. “We’re not.”

They left ten minutes later. Didn’t say goodbye. Didn’t tell anyone. They just walked home with their hands brushing every few steps, neither of them brave enough to lace their fingers together.

They were grounded for lying.

Misha broke up with his girlfriend the next day.

He stared at his phone for a long time before typing anything. Rewrote it twice. Deleted entire sentences. Therapy had taught him how to be honest without being cruel, but honesty still felt like setting something on fire and watching it burn anyway.

Megumi watched from the other side of the room in a beanbag, pretending to read. He didn't comment. He never did with this kind of thing. He trusted Misha to do it right.

Finally, Misha typed.

Misha:
hey. i need to talk about last night

The typing bubble appeared almost immediately.

Her:
yeah? are you okay? you kinda vanished

Misha exhaled slowly.

Misha:
that's kind of the point

A pause. Longer this time.

Her:
okay…?

Misha's fingers tightened around the phone.

Misha:
i don't feel good in this relationship

and i haven't for a while

Three dots. Gone. Three dots again.

Her:
did i do something wrong

He hated that question. Hated that it made him feel like the villain.

Misha:
no
you didn't

That part was true.

Misha:
i just don't feel the way i'm supposed to and i don't think that's fair to you

Another pause. Megumi shifted in the beanbag, making it squeak.

Her:
so what does that mean

Misha swallowed.

Misha:
it means i shouldn't keep pretending and you shouldn't have to guess where you stand

The reply took longer this time.

Her:
is this about your brother

Misha flinched.

Megumi looked up then, eyes sharp but calm.

Misha typed anyway.

Misha:
it's about me

A minute passed. Then another.

Her:
wow
okay

Her:
you could've just said you were bored

That one stung.

Misha stared at the screen until the words blurred.

Misha:
i'm not bored
i'm just not who you think i am and i dont want to be that person

either

There was no response after that.

The typing bubble never came back.

Misha locked his phone and set it face down on the table. His jaw was tight, expression blank in the way Megumi recognized immediately.

“You okay?” Megumi asked softly.

Misha nodded once. Then again, smaller. “Yeah.”

Megumi got up and walked to their bed. He dropped down to lean into him, head resting against his shoulder like muscle memory.

“You did the right thing,” he said.

Misha stared at the wall. “It still feels like shit.”

Megumi hummed in agreement. “Yeah.”

They sat there together, quiet and steady, letting the feeling pass through instead of swallowing it whole. It wasn’t dramatic. It wasn’t explosive. It just ended.

Sixteen meant learning how to leave without destroying everything behind you.

Even when it hurt.

Misha hated how his eyes tracked Megumi across rooms, measuring distance and counting time. Hated the way his chest burned when Megumi chose to sit somewhere else. *With* someone else. He had to clench his jaw when Megumi disappeared into late-night rehearsals and when he developed inside jokes with people he didn’t know.

Megumi hated how small and disposable he felt watching crowds orbit Misha. How easily people took his attention and kept it. He bristled when Misha’s ex-girlfriend lingered too long after practice, hand on his arm, laughing too loudly. How applause came so naturally to him on the ice, while Megumi had to *ask* to be seen on stage.

They tried to be normal about it.

They failed.

Their mom took them to therapy every Wednesday after school.

Therapy gave them words, but words didn't stop the feelings.

"I feel replaced," Megumi said once, staring at the carpet between them.

Misha swallowed. "I feel abandoned."

They sat in that silence like it was something fragile they might break if they moved wrong.

The relationship conversations at home hit the same way, but they were less contained and more angry. Shane and Ilya watched as their boys yelled at each other before stomping away.

"You don't need to sit with him every lunch," Misha snapped. Throwing his backpack on the floor in the kitchen

"You don't need to bring her *everywhere*," Megumi shot back. Flinging his shoes off at the door and jamming his feet into slippers.

"I don't bring her, Gumi; she just follows me!"

"Then tell her to fuck off! You didn't break up with her just to spend more time with her."

They apologized after. They always did. Therapy had taught them how, and their parents reinforced it.

The rink buzzed with excitement. Misha and Megumi were skating together, weaving through drills with effortless synchronicity. Scouts lingered at the boards, whispering, taking notes. Shane and Ilya watched from the stands, coffee in hand.

"Look at them," Shane murmured. "Like they share a nervous system."

Ilya nodded, arms crossed. "Velcro babies. Always have been."

Misha's grin was wide enough to split his face. He thrived under the attention, eyes darting to the scouts, imagining the trophies, the championships, the name recognition, and the games they would play together. Every pass, every shot, every movement felt like it was

meant to be seen.

Megumi moved with equal skill, but his expression was distant. His passes were precise, his skating clean, but the joy wasn't there. He was good, so incredibly good that scouts had already scribbled notes about him, but the thrill, the spark that Misha lived for, seemed absent. Shane noticed.

After practice, as the boys sat together lacing their skates, a scout approached, clipboard in hand. "Mikhail, Megumi, we'd like to follow you both for summer camps and junior tournaments. There's interest —serious interest."

Misha's hands shook. "You mean… really?"

"Really," the scout said, smiling. "We want to see how far you can go."

Misha's chest swelled. He glanced at Megumi. His brother's jaw was tight, shoulders hunched. He nodded politely at the scout but didn't look thrilled.

The ride home was quiet, Misha fidgeting with his hockey bag. Dinner, however, brought the conversation to a boil.

Shane had plated the spaghetti, and Ilya poured juice into small glasses. Misha's fork hovered mid-air, Megumi's gaze fixed on his plate.

"So," Shane began, casually, "you boys got offers today."

Misha practically vibrated. "Yes! Can you believe it? Scouts, okasan, real offers!"

Megumi set his fork down. "I don't think I want to do it anymore."

The table went silent. Spaghetti sat untouched. Shane blinked at Megumi but was unsurprised at the announcement before looking at Misha. He knew this was coming.

"You… don't want to play?" Misha's voice cracked. "But… the scouts —"

"I like the attention; I like the game," Megumi said quietly. "I like skating with you; I like hockey camp. But I don't love it. I don't want to live my life on ice schedules, scouts' notebooks, and pressure. I

want something else."

Ilya's jaw tightened and released in sporadic ticks. "You're serious?"

"I am," Megumi said, meeting his father's eyes without hesitation.

Misha felt his chest tighten painfully. The world he had imagined, the two of them playing together, unstoppable, names in lights, shuddered. He wanted to argue, beg, and insist. He wanted to pull Megumi to the floor and hit him until it made him change his mind.

Shane reached over, placing a hand on Misha's shoulder. "I know this feels like a betrayal, baby. But Megumi's choices are his own. Hockey isn't the only way to be successful."

Misha's jaw clenched. "But it's our thing, Mama. It's supposed to be ours." His voice broke in the way that teenagers found embarrassing, and it made Misha even angrier.

Ilya leaned in, voice low. "Mikhail, the world will try to define you by what you do together. But Gumi is not you. He has his path. That doesn't make yours less important."

Misha's fork clattered against his plate. Silence settled. The spaghetti grew cold. He looked at Megumi, who finally allowed himself a small, shy smile, and realized the fight wasn't about the game. It was about respect, freedom, and letting the other be his own person.

That night, after clearing the table, Misha sat with Shane in the living room. "I don't know how to… feel okay with it," he admitted.

Shane crouched beside him. "It's going to hurt, yes. You love him. You've loved him as a teammate as much as a brother. But loving someone also means letting them choose their own way, even if it's not the way you imagined."

Misha's hands gripped the couch cushion. "I just… I dreamed of us on the ice together forever."

"I know," Shane said softly. "And that dream doesn't die. It just… changes shape. You'll find new ways to shine. Gumi will too."

Misha nodded slowly, still burning with longing and grief, but also a tiny spark of understanding. It was hard. It was unfair. But it was real.

Megumi joined theater. Learned blocking. Learned how to project

without apologizing. Learned how to become someone loud and visible and untouchable under stage lights. Rehearsals ran late. Costumes replaced gear bags. His voice, clear and expressive, filled auditoriums instead of rinks.

Misha stayed on the ice.

He was brilliant there; he was the star center of both his club team and the high school team now. Fast, precise, and magnetic. Scouts noticed. Teachers excused absences. Girls and omegas hovered, drawn to his confidence and easy grin.

He smiled. He dated. He played the part. But what he wanted made him feel wrong. What Misha wanted, the pull he felt deep and unyielding, was toward alphas. Other boys who had sharp edges and competitive eyes. Who met his stare without flinching. Strength recognizing strength, challenge sparking want. Every instinct in him said *that. B*ut every voice around him said, "*Don't.*"

And that was… complicated.

Taboo.

Alpha liking alphas wasn't just frowned upon. It was mocked. Reduced. Labeled. Alpha–alpha attraction was whispered about; it was dismissed as a phase. If you were an alpha and you liked other alphas, people didn't call it attraction.

They called it *gay*.

Misha didn't hate the word. He hated that it erased everything else he was. He hated that it made him something people whispered about instead of something they respected. Misha didn't correct them. He just didn't date alphas. Not openly. Not yet, anyway.

Megumi knew. He always did.

"You don't look at them like you look at her," Megumi said once, after a game, watching Misha shrug off another girl's attention.

Misha exhaled. "Don't start."

"I'm not judging," Megumi said quietly. "I just see you."

That was the problem.

So he dated omegas instead. But that was worse becasue it felt like

he was lying to everyone, including himself.

Megumi saw through it.

“You don’t touch him like you mean it,” Megumi said one night, lying awake beside him in the dark.

“Stop analyzing me.”

“Stop lying to me,” Megumi whispered.

That hurt more than anything. They were growing apart, technically. Different schedules. Different circles. Different dreams. But not enough to be free of each other’s gravity. Slowly, carefully, *painfully*. But not far enough apart to stop seeing everything.

They still checked each other’s locations. Still waited up. Still fought like it mattered too much.

Sixteen meant learning that love could be suffocating even when it was real. That wanting space didn’t mean wanting absence. That sometimes the person you loved most was also the one you had to learn how not to orbit, but neither of them knew how to do that yet.

Sixteen meant wanting different futures.

Different stages. Different spotlights. But still turning instinctively toward each other in crowded rooms. Still flinching when the other pulled away. Still learning, awkwardly and imperfectly, that loving someone didn’t mean owning every piece of them.

And that separation didn’t have to mean loss.

Even if it felt like it might.

Eighteen Years Old

College felt like freedom and gravity at the same time.

They’d argued about it endlessly, finally agreeing that neither could handle being fully apart. Different dorms were out. Different schools were out. Separate lives, yes, but together enough that their tether didn’t snap.

So their dad made them apply to the same schools, and whichever

accepted both was their option.

Misha ended up getting into McGill for hockey, studying sports medicine with the intensity of someone who wanted to understand bodies as well as he used his own. It was luck that they offered Megumi acceptance for his music. He decided to study musical production. He carried himself through classes and practice rooms like someone who had always belonged on stage, whether in a recital hall or behind a mixing board.

Their parents were so proud of them. They had always understood their weirdly dependent dynamic, and they knew their sons wouldn't be able to survive in a healthy mindset if they were separated.

Their grandparents were even more excited; they jumped at the opportunity for them to use the small apartment just off campus that they owned from when their grandpa had attended McGill. It was cozy, with hardwood floors and an overgrown ivy wall outside the window. Two bedrooms, two desks, one living room, and one fridge constantly stuffed with food, both sensible and inexplicably unhealthy.

He had exclaimed that he knew he was right not to sell it, and their grandma just patted his hand and rolled her eyes as she handed them the keys.

They shared a car, but they mostly used it for grocery runs, moving supplies across campus, and going home for holidays. They each had a bicycle, and those were their main modes of transportation. They had routines now. Precise. Self-imposed. Balanced. It worked for the first two months of their freshman year.

And then came Amaya.

The rain had been relentless. Gray sheets of it, hammering the gutters, flooding the streets near their building. Misha was locking up the car, and Megumi was adjusting the strap of his violin case when a small, panicked mewl cut through the downpour.

They found her wedged in a gutter. Mud-caked, drenched, and eyes wide with terror.

“She’s tiny,” Megumi whispered. “Do you think she’s okay?”

“Yeah,” Misha said, crouching beside her, voice gentle. “We just need to get her out.”

It took three hands, one old backpack, and several muttered expletives. By the time they had her towel-wrapped and dripping into the apartment, they were both laughing through relief. She trembled in their arms, tiny claws kneading at the towel, the faintest mew breaking through every few seconds.

“She needs a name,” Megumi said, drying his hair, dripping water across the hardwood. “Amaya. Night rain.”

Misha grinned. “Fits.”

They learned responsibility quickly. Food schedules, litter, vet visits (courtesy of their parents' credit card), and training her to accept a bath without full-on mutiny. They split duties the way only twins could: one feeds while the other cleans, and one soothes while the other entertains.

Their parents still sent money for Amaya’s supplies.

“You’re 18,” Ilya had said in a note tucked into a package of cat litter. “You can pay for it yourselves.”

“Yeah, sure, with what jobs?” Misha muttered, reading the note aloud, “But thank you, Dad.”

“She’s worth it,” Megumi said. Amaya purred around his wrist like she knew she had already conquered the apartment.

Even with college classes, hockey practice, violin rehearsals, and late nights mixing tracks, they managed her. Somehow. Misha hadn’t really left Megumi’s life when he quit hockey. He still came to recitals, quietly in the back row, watching his twin own the stage.

Tonight was no different. Megumi walked on stage with his violin under his chin, posture perfect, bow hovering over strings. The spotlight hit his curls, and Misha felt that familiar tug in his chest: pride, awe, and love. Amaya sat in the backpack next to his feet, purring softly.

The first note rang out, delicate and commanding. Megumi’s alpha presence carried through each phrase, drawing emotion from the music as naturally as Misha drew speed and precision from the ice. He bowed, lifted, and swayed with the orchestra, his eyes closed to feel the music as it flowed, yet somehow commanding the space around him.

After the performance, the twins walked to a small café with Amaya nestled between them. Megumi carried the violin case on one shoulder, hair damp from the evening's adrenaline, eyes bright. Misha ordered a coffee and slid into the booth across from him.

"You really killed it tonight," Misha said softly, voice carrying both awe and envy.

Megumi shrugged, a smirk flickering. "It comes easily now. I dont even have to read the music, i just need to feel it."

They shared a quiet moment, sipping drinks, letting the noise of the café fade around them. Amaya pawed at a stray sugar packet, drawing both of their attentions.

Misha interupts it slowly, "Thats how I feel about skating. My brain just goes quiet and I can do whatever I need to win."

Megumi smiles at his brother. He had been worried for a long time that Misha would never forgive him for giving up hockey. They need to be separate enough to grow into their own people, but not far enough apart that they forget how the other one feels the world.

Their velcro fells stretched now, but with enough slack to finally let them breathe.

Misha skated onto the ice with scouts watching. Megumi played in recitals that brought small audiences to tears. And Amaya slept between them on the couch, a reminder of responsibility, chaos, and the little things worth holding onto.

Life felt precarious. Full. Messy. And theirs.

They were eighteen. And somehow, it all felt… steady.

Twenty-One

The graduation ceremony smelled like polished wood, old textbooks, and the faint metallic tang of anxiety. Caps shuffled, tassels swung, and diplomas waited.

Misha's name was called first. A roar from the crowd. Cameras flashing. Scouts leaning forward. He walked across the stage, shoulders back, the hockey player he'd always been, now officially a

McGill alum and freshly drafted to the Metros.

Shane was in the audience, hands clasped behind his head, leaning toward Ilya like he'd just scored a personal victory.

"You see this?" Shane hissed, elbowing Ilya in the ribs. "You raised a child who's now officially drafted to the Metros. That's *your* gene pool, Rozanov."

Ilya glared, red rising to his ears. "He's *our* gene pool. Stop pretending you didn't do anything."

Shane laughed. "Oh, please. I'm just here to make sure the world knows who's responsible for making your kid go to your rival team."

"Oh my god, why did I marry you?" Ilya groans loudly. David was laughing with Shane, and Yuna high-fived her son.

Misha waved at them, oblivious, carrying the kind of casual charisma that had everyone clapping harder. He had, as always, forgotten they were famous. Their parents. Hockey royalty. The kind of people who made the internet explode with GIFs, memes, and fan theories within seconds.

Megumi was called next. He walked across the stage confidently. A grace about him that only a performer could have. He bowed when he took his diploma and waved up at his family in the stands.

By the time he got off the stage, Twitter was ablaze.

@NHLwatch: Hockey royalty produces the next hockey royalty. Misha Hollander drafted to the Metros. #DynastyInTheMaking

@MetrosEdge: Imagine forgetting your parents are the literal kings of the rink and becoming one yourself. That's a flex.

@SportsFanatic24: Wait… the same parents produced a star center AND a violinist/singer/model? Are these kids real or a simulation?? #RozHollzyTwins

Misha, checking his phone mid-conversation with a teammate, frowned. "Why are so many people tweeting about me?"

"Because they know who your parents are," one muttered. "You're officially *their kid*, whether you like it or not."

Misha groaned. "I literally don't care. It's embarrassing."

@RandomNHLFan: I love how Misha sometimes forgets his parents are famous, and then Twitter blows up anyway. Ilya and Shane probably live for these micro-embarrassments.

@AlphaChaos: Shane and Ilya: hockey legends. Twins: "hold my beer" levels of talent. Someone start a GoFundMe for the rest of us to catch up.

Two months after graduating, Megumi's modeling career hit its first major milestone: New York Fashion Week.

Misha insisted on coming along for moral support. He didn't care about the runway, but he cared about his twin.

The city was chaos incarnate. Flashing lights, screaming photographers, fans pressing against barriers. Every step they took was documented, every movement a headline. Megumi leaned into it, practiced and effortless, hair styled perfectly, designer suit hugging his frame. Misha was still in street clothes; they were still designer, because his father would faint if his kids weren't wearing name brands, but it still made him feel slightly self-conscious as cameras clicked like machine guns.

"Smile," Megumi muttered. "Or… at least look alive."

"I am alive," Misha whispered, rolling his eyes. "You just look like you're about to fight a lion in a tux."

Megumi grunted. "Fair." Before flashing a toothy grin at the camera that Misha knew was a signature Rozanov smirk.

By the time they reached their front-row seats at the runway, Megumi's name was already trending. Outfits changed in blinding speed, models blurred by strobes. Paparazzi were relentless, snapping every angle. And, inevitably, the shots of the twins together hit social media.

@NYTFans: Hottest twins in North America spotted at NYFW. Megumi in Prada, Misha in… Balenciaga streetwear. absolutely iconic.

@TwinGoalsDaily: Hollander twins breaking the internet. One plays center, one plays muse. Bow down.

@ModelAndPuck: When your genetics are just unfair: Megumi is

literally glowing and Misha looks like he could crush your skull with his thighs..

Megumi laughed quietly, ducking behind Misha as they tried to exit without being mobbed. Misha shook his head. “You’re going to give me a heart attack before we even hit the afterparty.”

“You’re stuck with me forever, even death wont let you escape me.” Megumi said, smirking.

By the end of the weekend, covers were out. Vogue, GQ, The New Yorker. The hottest twins in North America. One a hockey prodigy, one a model and musician. The internet nearly broke.

@FanGirlCentral: Megumi is in musicals *and* modeling, while Misha is about to crush the Bruins?? Shane and Ilya, pls stop breaking the world with your genes 😩 #TwinGoals

@MusicAndIce: Megumi signing contracts and modeling while Misha is drafted to NHL… The Hollander twins are 21 and doing adulting better than anyone else in 20XX

Despite all of the rage online, the twins have a fairly normal life. They still shared an apartment, but now it's in downtown Montreal. It is a snazzy and spacious loft with exposed brick, large windows, and an impractical but gorgeous spiral staircase. Amaya still lives with them and likes to hide in the plants around the loft, constantly spilling dirt everywhere.

Their Velcro wasn’t gone, but it had settled as they grew into adulthood. They cooked together, did laundry together, and occasionally argued over who got the bathroom first. They still had moments of jealousy, but it didn't happen as often anymore. They knew where they stood with each other and how to create boundaries

---

Two months after Fashion Week, Misha’s first professional season had begun. Shane and Ilya flew in for his first playoff game.

The arena was electric. Fans chanted, lights flashed, and the roar of the crowd was a living thing. Shane and Ilya sat side by side, elbows brushing, stomachs tight with pride and nerves.

Misha skated onto the ice during warmups. He looked like every memory Shane had of him growing up: the focused intensity, the

slight mischievous grin, and the unrelenting will to dominate the rink.

Ilya leaned forward. “That’s our kid. That’s… ours.”

Shane nodded, voice low. “Yeah… ours.”

When the puck dropped, Misha was everywhere. Fast, precise, magnetic. He took the center line, weaving through defensemen, eyes flicking to the goal, instinct guiding every movement.

“He’s… he’s grown into himself,” Shane whispered. “Completely.”

Ilya nodded, watching his son push the limits of everything they’d taught him, everything they’d ever lived for. By the final period, Misha had scored the game-winning goal, sending the Metros into the next round. Shane jumped to his feet, clapping until his hands hurt. Ilya roared his pride, throat tight with awe, mouth full of cheer.

They watched Misha skate to the glass, helmet in hand, grin wide, eyes locking onto them. He skated over, breathless, leaning forward to yell, “Did you see that old man?” Just like when he was little.

“Every second,” Shane said, voice catching.

“I am not that old!” Ilya yelled back, making his son and the rest of the crowd laugh. Amid the chaos of fans, cameras, and celebration, the three of them, father, mother, and son, shared a quiet moment of triumph. No matter how famous, how busy, or how Velcro the twins had been, or how far they had flown from the apartment in Montreal, they always came home to each other.

Hockey, music, fashion, life. They had conquered it all.

Megumi’s current relationship was serious. He had been seeing an omega model who adored him and understood his relationship with his brother. He never pushed or tried to invade their relationship, and it made it easier for all three of them. He was thoughtful and patient and someone who could handle the storm of Megumi’s chaotic schedules and the occasional scandalously viral picture. He reminded Misha of their mom and how he acted with their dad.

Megumi was happy. Fully, openly, and incredibly happy.

Misha’s life, in contrast, revolved around competition. Not on the ice,

exactly. He thrived there. But off it was another story. He was constantly orbiting a new rival in the Boston Raiders. He spent hours analyzing plays, comparing stats, and plotting the subtle strategies of dominance.

Christmas dinner was when the hilarity peaked. The apartment smelled of roast, baked goods, and pine. Misha cleared his throat, fork in hand, eyeing his parents, grandparents, and twin.

“So,” he said casually, “what would you say if I said I think I’m… kind of in a *thing* with someone on the Boston Raiders?”

Shane choked on his water. Ilya’s fork clattered. Megumi’s eyes widened. And his grandparents said, “Oh dear,” simultaneously.

“What is this *thing*?” Shane wheezed, and Misha shifted at the amusement in his mom's eyes. He was too scared to look at his dad. “We kind of, like, I don’t know. We kinda made out in the east bathroom in the Boston stadium last game.”

Ilya was immediately laughing so hard he leaned back in his chair. “I knew you were my son, but if I didn’t before, I would now.”

Ilya was cackling, tears at the corners of his eyes. “Why did you pick that bathroom? Was it because nobody uses it so you could meet without anyone seeing anything? This is perfect. Absolutely perfect.” Misha would have answered, but the way his dad said it made him suspicious.

Megumi, ever the clone of his brother, immediately knew what he was thinking and said it out loud.

“Oh my god! You are making out with your arch nemesis in the same bathroom our parents did!” He made a loud gagging sound, and their mom was gasping through peals of embarrassed laughter.

Misha tried to stay serious. “It’s… complicated.”

Megumi rolled his eyes, smirking. “That’s literally the understatement of the century, Misha. You are relieving our parents’ forbidden romance!”

Shane and Ilya laughed until their sides hurt. They *could not stop*. The chaos of hockey, rivalry, love, and public life colliding perfectly in one moment of familial absurdity.

Misha, exasperated, muttered under his breath, “I cannot believe my life is this dramatic.”

Megumi grinned. “Our whole family is famous. What did you think was going to happen?”

Misha scowled, but the corners of his mouth twitched. He couldn’t really argue.

Chapter End Notes

> Funny note that I wanted to add but didn't. My dad could not tell me and my sister apart, so he wrote our first initial on the bottom of our right foot in Sharpie until we could walk. There is a distinct possibility we were mixed up at birth and have been living as each other, but I claim my current name, so you can suck it, Fiona. 😜

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!